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BEST Detective

December, 1947

Vol. 1 No. 1

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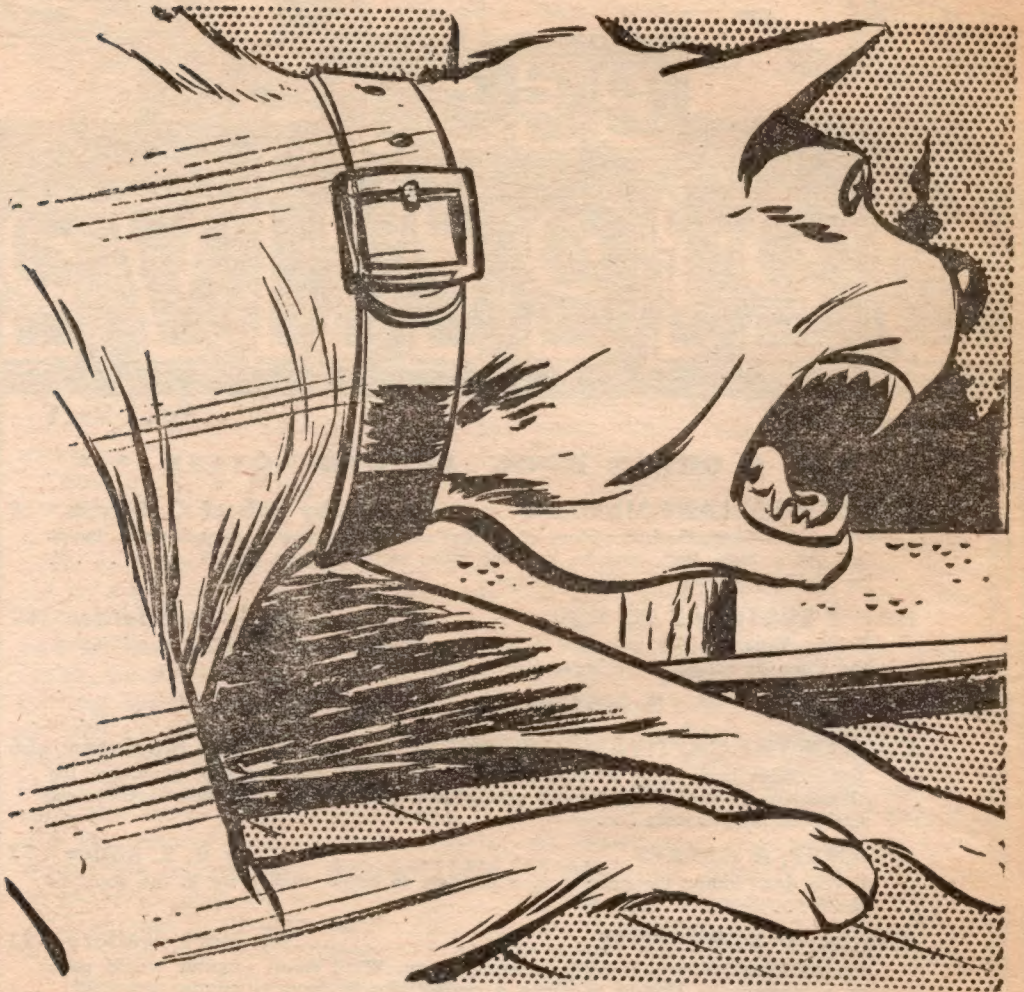
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THE LOVERS' LANE



CHAPTER I

A COOLING east wind rendezvoused in the hot darkness above Lake St. Clair and then moved in over the suffocating Michigan shore. Behind it, lightning fluttered sullenly along the world's black rim. On the opposite slope of night a siren was fretting remotely against the oppressive heat. The sound never penetrated the air-conditioned gaiety of the party in the swank Grosse Pointe residence.

On the long shadowed veranda facing the lake, Dr. Steve Ferrier stood alone, smoking an unwanted cigarette. A girl had given it to him from an odd jade-and-gold case. Another girl had told him, giggling, the latest dirty story she'd picked up last week in New York. Still another had flashed silent but unmistakable messages to him with lovely blue eyes. But it still added up to a lousy party.

He didn't belong there. He could slip quietly away right now and no one would miss him. No one actually

WHAT MURDER WEAPON WOULD LEAVE THE VICTIMS WITH

MURDERS

Tense Psychological

Mystery Novel By **ROBERT C. DENNIS**



The huge animal was coming for him!

Down the deep, dark corridors of Ferrier's consciousness a thought was booming like a huge bell—he had the killer cold, helpless, at his mercy . . . if he could only seize the answer why

had been more than fleetingly aware of his presence. He hadn't even been required to present the handsome, engraved invitation which Dick Cutler had sent him.

The invitation, along with Dick's

cryptic note, still reposed in an inner pocket. Moving over to where light streamed out of a window, Ferrier took out the note and reread it, hunting for some previously missed significance.

THEIR THROATS TORN OUT? Gripping Novel of Minds Gone Amok!

Steve:

Remember me—Michigan '38? I need some professional assistance. Use the enclosed invitation and meet me at the Fennenbock's before ten o'clock. Keep it quiet, don't ask anyone about me, and don't let me down! Depending on you,

*Sincerely,
Dick Cutler*

A troubled expression on his thin, controlled face, Ferrier checked the time on his wrist watch. Ten minutes short of midnight. He had been waiting almost two hours, restrained from chucking the whole thing by the vague urgency in the wording of Cutler's note. *Don't ask anyone about me*—what did that mean? It wasn't intended to include the Fennenbock's certainly

Mrs. Fennenbock was a large, silver-haired woman, smoking a cigarette in a ten-inch holder. She gave Ferrier a blank look. "My dear boy, whoever is Dick Cutler? I'm certain I never heard of him! Then why would he be at my party?"

"I must have the wrong name," Ferrier murmured, and faded away before it occurred to her to ask what he was doing at her party.

BACK IN the shadows on the verandah again Ferrier tried to recollect, from over the eight year lapse, something of Cutler's personality. If irresponsibility had been a part of his character then, his absence now was probably meaningless and unimportant. Perhaps a practical joke?

What did he remember about the man? They hadn't been intimates, though Cutler was an amiable sort. Came from a good eastern family. A whiz at math. Crossword puzzle expert, if that told anything! Majored in economics, joined some New York investment firm after graduation, which apparently included periodic trips to Washington to lobby for one thing or another.

It was probably more dramatic than it sounded, Ferrier concluded, and

felt a faint sense of relief. That was the word for Cutler—dramatic. Ferrier remembered indistinctly that Cutler's record during the war had been consistently spectacular. Even the note had carried the same overtone of drama, more than likely totally unjustified. That settled it: Ferrier drew no masochistic pleasure from staying on at a party that had no interest for him.

It was just midnight and the lightning was making jagged cracks in the sky when Ferrier slipped quietly into his coupe and drove back toward Detroit.

Once beyond the refined din of the party his ear picked up the distant fuming of a siren and the sound touched him with an uneasiness that irritated him tremendously. There was no reason for it, no valid, professional basis for such a reaction. All his emotions had long ago been analyzed, properly catalogued, and shelved. And yet here he was developing powers of premonition!

Angrily, his foot held down the gas pedal, sending the car lunging through darkness. This was not the first and only symptom that he was becoming—unadjusted. His interest in his work had fallen off. Miss Andrews, his office nurse, had borne the brunt of his irritability until she had bluntly suggested a vacation.

His bag had been packed when Dick Cutler's note had forestalled him, sending him on this fruitless trip to a Grosse Pointe party instead of to Wisconsin, as he'd planned. Now, oddly, the edge was gone from the vacation at the Dells....

Abruptly his foot came off the gas pedal. There'd been an accident on the highway ahead. His mind grasped that even before his eyes picked out the component parts of the scene: cars pulled up on the shoulder, the darting beams of flashlights, the gleaming black boots and Sam Browne belts of the State Police uniforms, and the definite signs of authority in the confusion.

Ferrier pulled down sharply, angling off the strip of pavement on to the shoulder. A State trooper closed in on him.

"You were going pretty fast, mister." He pointed toward a knot of people peering into a roadside ditch. "A little less speed might save you from ending up like that sometime."

"Anyone hurt?" Ferrier asked quickly.

The trooper's square face was grim and faintly gray. "We're waiting for the Coroner. We can't do her any good!"

"I'm a doctor," Ferrier said, "of sorts. Can I do anything?"

"What do you mean 'of sorts'?"

"I'm a psychiatrist."

The trooper shrugged. "Personally, I don't think even a legitimate doctor can do her much good now."

"I'm sure I remember enough of my 'legitimate medicine'," Ferrier retorted, "if—"

"Take a look, if you like, Doc."

FERRIER GOT out and crossed the road. He remembered the spot now. A dirt road veered off from the highway in the direction of the lake and lost itself in a grove of maple trees. On his way to Grosse Pointe earlier he had decided to stop to ask directions at a small shanty, half hidden in the weeds beyond the dirt road. But a woman puttering at the side of the odd square-built structure had looked at him once and then deliberately gone inside the shanty. Half amused, half annoyed, Ferrier had driven on to a service station and obtained a road map. . . .

In the darkness now he couldn't see the shanty. He pushed through the people clustered silently at the edge of the ditch.

It was a station wagon, over on its side, the driver's side. The left window was splintered like jagged saw teeth. Otherwise there was no discernible damage. The woman in there was young, no more than thirty, red-headed and slender. She was wearing slacks and a white shirt, streaked with blood. There was practically nothing at all left of her throat.

Ferrier estimated she had been dead for several hours. His voice hushed, he asked, "Know who she is?"

A second trooper answered, direct-

ing his words toward his partner. "Found her purse in the back seat. Looks like she's Allison Whitbeck. Driver's license, identification card, and a couple of checks all have the same name."

He tossed the bag to the first trooper. Ferrier, peering over his shoulder, saw the contents of the bag. He saw all the trivial and all the vital articles that every woman carries. He saw, most of all, the jade-and gold compact and the jade-and-gold cigarette lighter. He said aloud, involuntarily, "There's no cigarette case."

"So what—" The faint derision faded suddenly from the trooper's voice. "Yeah, Doc," he said. "That's right. That there lighter and compact are part of a set. There oughta be a case to go with it. Nobody is going to have a lighter, but no case." His eyes slid up slowly, almost reluctantly, to fix upon the second trooper's face.

"Must have dropped out, Corey." The other trooper's face was a mottled red.

"Yeah. Must've fallen out." Corey covered his partner quickly for the benefit of the crowd. "Probably on the floor of the station wagon."

"It's—" Ferrier stopped. The dead girl's missing compact was not the same one. The set was not necessarily unique, distinctive as it was.

There was no point in belaboring a small coincidence. The girl who had told him the dirty story, fresh from Fifth Avenue, or the one with the lovely blue eyes, who had tried to flirt with him, someone had a set just like it. How could there be any connection with Allison Whitbeck, dead in a ditch before the party started—and thirty miles away?"

He was aware, suddenly, that the troopers were staring at him, waiting for the rest of his sentence. He said, "Who found her?"

"A couple of neckers." Corey gestured at a young couple standing on the fringe of the crowd where they wouldn't have to see the wrecked station wagon. "This is lovers' lane, Doc, this grove of trees. And being a Saturday night—they

were coming back from the lake and pulled off here to park. That's how they saw it."

"Strange the people in the shanty didn't hear the accident."

"Shanty, Doc?"

"Over there." Ferrier aimed a finger in the approximate direction.

"You got the wrong spot, Doc. There's no shanty there."

"Of course there is," Ferrier snapped. He remembered the scene perfectly; the dirt road forking off into the trees, the shanty just at the edge of the grove, and farther north, beyond the limits of the grove, a white farm house with a big red barn. He swung his arm a few degrees till his finger pointed to where the farm should be. "There's a farm over there, isn't there? With a new red barn, very large."

"You got the farm right," somebody in the crowd said. "But there's no shanty."

COREY TRAINED the beam of his flashlight against the backdrop of the grove and drew it slowly back and forth. There was no shanty nestling in the long grass.

"You better lay off that stuff, Doc," Corey said seriously, "especially when you're drivin'."

Everyone stared at him queerly. Ferrier opened his mouth and then said nothing. The uneasiness within him, that ridiculous sense of foreboding had suddenly magnified itself. There simply was no shanty and no woman puttering beside it. It was as non-existent as Dick Cutler had been at the houseparty....

Thunder crashed much closer now and lightning ripped savagely across the fabric of darkness. The cluster of onlookers broke up, hurrying toward the shelter of their cars. Ferrier went, too. He had still an hour's drive back to Detroit. He had, moreover, to do some thinking. Something was happening to him, and all at once his concern was real and immediate.

The car just ahead of him got under way, curving back on to the pavement, making a blatant U-turn in the faces of the State Police, and

slid away into the darkness. Ferrier started his own car and drove on just as the rain started.

For a while he tried to coalesce all the incidents into the one picture: Cutler's note and his nonappearance at the party; the cigarette case in the hand of the anonymous girl; the station wagon with one window smashed, but otherwise undamaged; the dead Allison Whitbeck, and her compact and lighter, but no cigarette case; and finally the shanty and the woman puttering beside it.. He shook his head. He had seen that shanty! But even so there was no pattern, no common denominator, no single strand from which all these things could hang—except one ugly thought that he drove from his mind the moment it appeared.

Next, he tried to disperse the incidents, to make them separate, unrelated items of no significance. In maddening fashion his mind summarily rejected that, refusing the easy rationalization of coincidence. Wearily, he gave it up and forced himself to concentrate on finding his way home.

He had found his way to Grosse Pointe with the use of the road map. Turning on the dashlight, he fumbled for it in the glove compartment. His fingers touched something smooth and metallic. He put his hand on the object. He pulled it out into the glow of the dashlight. It was a jade-and-gold cigarette case.

It took a full minute for his rigidly trained mind to control the riot of fantastic thoughts that ran wild in his head. It was a cigarette case. *The* cigarette case. It was real, solid, nothing of his imagination. Now. Go on from there. It had been planted in his car by one of the onlookers at the scene of the accident. Someone, fearing a general search, had gotten rid of it in the first likely spot. Or was it the case from the Fennenbock's party? There had to be two cases. He closed his eyes and laid pressure against his brain trying to bring into focus that girl's face.

He saw the case in her hand. He saw her arm and shoulder. That was

as far as he could go. After that there was a row of faces. All the young feminine faces at the party. He simply couldn't merge the incident of the cigarette case with one definite face.

Then *why?* Why had she hidden the case in his car? He couldn't actually explain anything. At no period that he could remember had he ever been so mentally confused. It was as if all his fine, relentless reasoning power was simply disintegrating on him.

An hour later, as an ironic footnote, he realized he was hopelessly lost.

Getting lost was natural enough; he'd done it before. But tied in with all the other events there was something ominous about it. He laughed shakily; perhaps he really did need a vacation. He drove on until he came to a state roadside park, pulled off into it and parked. The rain had broken the heat; it was cooler here than any place else. There was nothing to be gained by blundering around at three o'clock in the morning.

Ferrier slept.

CHAPTER II

THE SUN had already begun forging its brass-bound grip on the world when Steve Ferrier awoke with a crick in his neck and perspiration soaking his shirt collar. It was eight o'clock and pleasantly warm but with a hint of the heat to come. With a groan Ferrier sat up.

He'd forgotten to take off his shoes before falling asleep and his feet appeared to have swollen. His body was stiff and cramped but, strangely, the weight of depression had vanished with the darkness. The wild apprehensions caused by last night's fantastic events had given way to irritation. There was nothing wrong with him that a hot shower and a change of clothes wouldn't cure.

There was a logical explanation for everything that had happened. Starting his car, he turned back the way he'd come until he came in

sight of the farm with the new red barn. The station wagon was already gone from the ditch. Ferrier had a fleeting picture of the dead girl lying in her overturned car, her throat slashed open by the broken window, and he wondered if even her death was just as it appeared. It was at best a very freakish accident....

Ferrier drove past the dirt road and turned into a long lane leading up to the farm house. The name on the aluminum-painted mailbox was Adam Wysorek.

The farm, despite the new, well-constructed buildings, was in a neglected condition. Ragweed and mustard grew wild between the barn and the houses except for a connecting path. There was no sign of any stock.

Ferrier stopped the car and got out, alert for an unfriendly farm dog. He held no fear of dogs; he was a dog lover, and had never been bitten. His caution was due to vanity.

"What c'n I do for yuh, mister?" The farmer stood behind the screen door of the kitchen, watching Ferrier expressionlessly. He was a small, sturdy man with a growth of dull red whiskers, though his hair was quite black. "You lookin' for something maybe?"

Ferrier laughed. "Just keeping an eye open for your dog."

"Haven't got a dog." He opened the screen and came outside. "Got no use for the beasts. Wouldn't have one around."

Ferrier shrugged, made no comment on that. "I suppose you know about the accident?"

The man's eyes were suddenly watchful. "The State cops was up to ask questions. I didn't know nothing to tell them." His tone was pointed.

"I see," Ferrier said. "All I wanted to ask about was the shanty that was down there between the dirt road and the grove."

"No shanty there."

"But I saw—"

"It was a trailer," the farmer said as if he hadn't heard Ferrier. "An artist woman give me a dollar to let her camp there for a day or two. She left last night—" He broke off as

Ferrier laughed ruefully.

Of course, a trailer, its wheels hidden by the tall grass. The car could have been parked behind it out of sight of the highway. He stopped laughing. "When did she leave?"

"Last night."

"I know. But at what time?" The girl in the station wagon had died somewhere before nine o'clock, he estimated. Ferrier had passed there around eight-fifteen, on his way to Grosse Pointe. "Was it before dark?"

THE FARMER lifted his shoulders in a disinterested shrug. "Wouldn't know that, mister. She was there yesterday, gone this morning. . . Any more questions?"

"Just one. Do you know who she is, or where she went?"

"North, she said. Up along the river. Going to make pictures of the river. I wouldn't know who she is."

"Well, thanks," Ferrier said. "That was an unfortunate accident last night. She was very young."

The farmer's pale blue eyes fixed on Ferrier. "Was it an accident, mister?"

Ferrier started. "Wasn't it?"

"I don't know," the farmer said. "I didn't see it. And the police didn't say."

"Then why did you ask?"

"No reason." He turned his back and started to open the screen door. Then he hesitated, glanced over his shoulder, and said, "She was the daughter of a millionaire, mister. Daughters of millionaires don't need to park in lovers' lane. They got places to go. Lots of places to go," his voice faded as he went on into the house, "if you got millions. . ."

Back down at the highway Ferrier hesitated, uncertain where to go. Wisconsin had little allure for him now. There were too many things left unanswered: Cutler's absence, the gold-and-jade cigarette case still in the glove compartment, Allison Whitbeck's death, and the lady artist in her trailer—Why had she left last night? And was it before or after Allison Whitbeck went into the ditch and bled to death. Ferrier swung his car to the right and drove

north toward where Lake St. Clair narrowed abruptly to become a river.

It was eleven o'clock when he came upon the trailer he was looking for, a squarish, outdated, perhaps home-made affair. It still looked to Ferrier like a shanty on wheels. The highway paralleled the river with a glossy strip of land about seventy feet wide separating them. It was there, in the shade of a willow tree, that the trailer was parked. Even if he wouldn't have recognized the woman, there was the painting she was working on.

She was so intent on her work she didn't hear Ferrier's car turn off the highway. Approaching the trailer he saw that she was young and lovely despite rumpled, paint-daubed slacks and dirty tennis shoes. A bright blue scarf covered her head, clashing with her green blouse as if she might be color blind. Peering over her shoulder at the water-color, just before she swung around, Ferrier saw that she wasn't. . .

"What do you want?" she demanded angrily. "Will you please go away?"

"You're inconsistent," Ferrier pointed out gravely. "How can I tell you what I want if I go away?"

"It was a rhetorical question. I'm want." She said, stressing each word, "Just—go—away."

"Before I've commented on your painting?"

She made an exasperated gesture with her hand. "All right—I paint not at all interested in what you very well in your opinion! You're no expert, you only know what you like, but you like this very much indeed! Does that cover it?"

"No," Ferrier said, squinting at the river scene. "I think it's quite mediocre. And so do you."

"Well, thanks very much," she snapped, and threw the brush on the ground. "Do you have any more unpleasant comments?"

"Do you think it's good?" Ferrier demanded.

"It stinks!" she said briefly. "I stink! Are you a critic?"

Ferrier laughed a little. "No, I'm a doctor. And as a matter of fact, I'm one of those unspeakable people

who only know what they like. I could tell by your expression and the grim way you were going at it that you weren't very satisfied. So if you're not satisfied, why should I be? Can I look at some of your other paintings?"

"Why?"

"Curiosity, I guess. And partly to be polite."

"Well, don't be polite. I'm fed up to here with men who try to be polite!...If I show you one more painting, will you go quietly on your way?"

FERRIER nodded, smiling. He was convinced now she had no guilty knowledge of last night's accident. If she could tell him anything of value, it would be something the significance of which she was unaware.

"Wait here," she said, and went into the trailer. She came out in a moment with a cigarette between her lips, a canvas in one hand, a pack of matches in her other. Ferrier reached for the matches and had the canvas pushed brusquely into his reaching hand. "If I'm big enough to smoke it, I'm big enough to light it."

Ferrier shrugged and held the painting up at arm's length. He recognized the scene instantly: the farm house and the red barn, with a sunlit field stretching away on a gentle slope toward where the highway would be. In the lower corner was the black smudge of the maple grove. Balancing this was a small dark spot on the sunlit slope.

"What's that?" Ferrier asked.

She looked. "The farm dog, of course."

"Oh, artistic license."

"What do you mean?" she demanded.

"I mean you just dreamed up the dog."

"I did not. That scene is just as I saw it. That's the trouble with my work. I'm a draughtsman, not an artist. If there'd been a Chic Sale building there, I'd have put it in. I have no artistic perception. No imagination."

"But the farmer doesn't have a

dog," Ferrier objected. "He's got no use for the beasts—wouldn't have one around the place."

"He had one around the place yesterday, whether he knew it or not." She accepted the canvas from him and waited silently.

"He had an accident on his place yesterday, too. A girl overturned her car in that ditch along the dirt road that goes into the grove. Last night—about nine o'clock."

The girl looked at him. There was cynical intelligence in her gray eyes and in the incisive yet exquisite features. She said, "Why, that's near where I was parked.... Anyone hurt?"

"Killed herself." Ferrier, watching intently, saw no reflex at all. The girl turned it over in her mind then shrugged it off. Almost too callous, Ferrier thought. Most women would have shown some reaction. He wondered if news of the accident was actually news to her. She tossed away her cigarette and started back into the trailer.

"I'll watch for your better stuff in all the galleries," Ferrier called after her. He had an idea she wouldn't come out again until he had left. "How do you sign them?"

She turned and looked at him. "God, if there's one thing I'm fed up to here on it's men who try to be subtle! My name is Janice Saunders. And I'm going to be busy tonight. Since I live in a trailer I don't have a phone, so I can't give you my number. Also, I'm part gypsy and I wander wherever my heart desires, so I can't tell you where I'll be tomorrow."

"Would you tell me if you could?" Ferrier asked.

There was a faint suspicion of a smile at the corners of her well-formed mouth. "I see we understand each other," she said, and went on into the trailer and closed the door.

FERRIER walked back to his car whistling. He didn't know a thing more than he'd already known but he felt immeasurably better. It was a relief to talk to someone who was not neurotic or psychiatric. A vacation

from his practice was certainly what he needed.

He swung back on the highway, still headed north, and drove slowly along the river until he came to a sign that read: Old English Tavern. It was a low, sprawling red-brick building, new enough that the ivy which eventually would cover the walls was only half way up. The two things, the girl and this pleasant, inviting inn formed his decision. He'd stay here a day or so, perhaps go on as the spirit moved him. He thought wistfully that being a Gypsy might be fun....

Inside the Tavern it was cool and quiet. Sounds of people having a good time in the river floated into the lobby. Ferrier approached the desk. "I hope you have a room," he said.

"Yes. I believe we do," the clerk smiled courteously. He gave Ferrier a card to sign, signaled for a bell boy. "Room Seventeen, Mr—" He glanced at the card, "Oh, yes, Dr. Ferrier. I believe we have a message for you, Doctor."

"A mess—" Ferrier stopped. The clerk had turned away. It was a mistake, obviously. Some other Doctor Ferrier. No one knew he was going to stop at the Tavern, because he hadn't known it himself until just a few minutes ago. The clerk laid an envelope on the desk in front of him. Ferrier's explanation never got off his lips. The name written there was Dr. Steven Ferrier. And the handwriting was familiar.

He couldn't place it immediately because his mind wouldn't settle down long enough to concentrate. "Ah—how long ago did my friend leave this?"

"It was here when I came on duty this morning," the clerk said, apologetic for his inability to be more helpful.

Ferrier said thanks, and numbly followed the bell boy to his room. It came to him as he was going through the door whose handwriting it was—Dick Cutler's.

As soon as he was alone Ferrier ripped open the envelope and took out a single sheet of Tavern stationery. The note read:

Saturday

Steve:

Couldn't wait any longer. Will phone here about noon tomorrow. Don't let me down, kid, this thing's murder! Stay here till you hear from me.

Dick

Ferrier went over to a mirror and looked for a long moment at his reflection. It panicked him. His brown hair was in disarray, his eyes were bloodshot and his growth of beard startled him. Then he realized that for the first morning since his last vacation three years ago he had missed a shave. But his eyes were still level and direct, and his narrow, strong face as controlled as ever.

Reassured, he focused his mind on Cutler's note. *This thing's murder* ... was that a figure of speech or had Cutler really known Allison Whitbeck and was implying she had been murdered?

Remembering how little the station wagon had been damaged and how badly lacerated the girl's throat had been, Ferrier could only speculate. And the rest of the note Ferrier didn't understand at all. He was back where he'd been last night. He didn't understand anything. "And," he said aloud, half in irony, "I'm getting fed up to here with it all!"

Furthermore, he was going to do something about it. If Cutler didn't contact him very soon, Ferrier would take steps of his own, including the telling of all he knew to the State Police.

He had showered and shaved and was lying down, clad only in his shorts, when the phone rang. Now, he thought, Cutler can do a lot of explaining. And it had better be a darn good story.

The desk clerk said, "Dr. Ferrier, there is a young lady in the lobby to see you. She doesn't wish to give her name."

"But that's im—" He had started to say it was impossible, no one knew he was here. Then it occurred to him that Cutler, for some devious

reason, had sent someone in his place. Ferries said, "I'll be down in ten minutes."

CHAPTER III

THERE WAS no one in the lobby. Ferrier went through the double doors leading to a long verandah facing the river. Janice Saunders in clean and freshly pressed yellow slacks and cherry polka-dot top, scanty enough to give her a lot of sun-tan, was sitting in a wicker armchair. She had a rolled-up newspaper in her hand.

Ferrier said, "I hope you have a sound and logical explanation for how you knew I was here."

"I didn't know, I only surmised. This is really the only summer hotel on this part of the river. I suppose you were a vacationer, so I looked in the parking lot and saw a car that looked like yours. The attendant said it belonged to Doctor Ferrier and I remembered that's what you said you were."

"That's good," Ferrier said, and meant it. He had reached the point where even the obvious and simple explanations didn't occur to him. "Why did you want to find me?"

"Have you seen the Detroit paper?" She waved the rolled-up newspaper at him, but didn't unroll it.

"No," Ferrier said. "Why?"

"There's a story on Allison Whitbeck's death." She watched him narrowly. "Maybe it wasn't a car accident."

Ferrier reached for the paper. She drew it away. "I'll tell you," she said. "Her throat wasn't cut on the broken window. It wasn't cut at all. It was torn."

Ferrier said nothing. Tension was fast building up inside of him. Down on the dock a girl in a green swim suit dove into the water and swam toward a large raft anchored about thirty feet out. Ferrier watched her silently until she climbed up on the crowded float. Then he said, "Go on."

"The police think it happened outside the car and that she crawled in, bleeding to death. She got the car started, then lost consciousness and drove into the ditch." She stopped

and unrolled the paper and began to read. "The county coroner stated that the peculiar manner in which the dead girl's throat was lacerated suggested that she had been attacked by some animal. The theory that it was a wolf, strayed from the northern part of the State, was scoffed at by veteran hunters. A savage dog was..."

Out on the float somebody pushed a squealing girl into the water. It was a distant, annoying sound like a snicker during a funeral service. Chills floated along Ferrier's spine and despite the heat he shivered inwardly. A nameless dread put a lead weight in the pit of his stomach.

"A wolf," he said quietly. "It could have been a wolf."

She shook her head. "Are wolves black? I told you I painted things just as I saw them. It was black, a gleaming black like—a Great Dane."

"That's how it looked in the painting," Ferrier admitted. "You seem to take this pretty well in stride—for a woman."

She looked at him coldly. "I was a newspaper woman in Chicago for six years. I covered an axe murder once and I've seen a body wrapped in six packages. I'm hard to upset."

Ferrier said suddenly, "Look, I'm not being subtle now—I want to talk this out with you. But I'm expecting a call any minute. Will you wait a few minutes and then help me out?"

"So you do know something about this!" she accused, putting the paper up in his face. "I thought you were a little too elaborately casual this morning!"

"I think I know something. I mean I do know something—but I don't know what it means. How about it? Will you wait?"

"All right," she said, shrugging. "I can take a swim."

"Have you got a suit with you?"

"In my car. Is it all right to use your room to change? Or do you have a reputation to protect?" She made a sour face when he opened his mouth to answer. "I know—my reputation! Well, don't worry about it. Why is it men are either on the make

or they're falling all over themselves being gallant. I'm so fed up on gallant men I could gag!"

Ferrier said shortly, "Do you prefer the on-the-make kind?"

"Let me amend my last statement. I'm so fed up on men, all men, stupid, subtle, gallant, wolfish—" She almost did gag on the last word.

"Get your suit," Ferrier said, and went to tell the desk clerk to have him paged when Cutler called.

HE NEEDED a few minutes to think. There wasn't a shadow of a doubt in his mind that the dog Janice Saunders had seen in the field and had so faithfully put into her painting was the animal that had attacked Allison Whitbeck. But that had nothing to do with Cutler, he told himself. How could there be any connection?

Janice came out in a bathing suit, solid blue back, flowered in front. She glared when Ferrier stared too long and went on down to the dock. Ferrier went upstairs. Her flimsy clothing was laid across his bed and he smiled a little at the thought of her independence, her vast impatience, and her inconsistencies. She would be of great assistance, he thought, if she would put her crisp, realistic mind to work for him.

She was out on the float when Ferrier came outside. Cutler still hadn't phoned. Ferrier ran across the sloping lawn to the dock and hit the water in a long flat dive. He was at home in the water, his ability to swim was almost as old as his ability to walk. He would be a little out of condition for anything above a mile, but he had lost none of his skill.

The float was still crowded with other bathers, mostly girls in brief and attractive suits. Ferrier swam alongside, clinging to the anchor rope while he hunted for Janice. His gaze, sliding from face to face, whipped back sharply to a familiar one. A blonde girl in a green bathing suit. His memory battled only briefly to identify her. It was the girl who'd given him a cigarette from the jade-and-gold case.

She was sitting alone on the edge

of the float, moodily kicking her feet in the water. She didn't see Ferrier until he drew up beside her.

"I'd like to talk to you," he said in a low tone.

Shock rippled over her face briefly, then she had a too-bored expression. "I beg your pardon?"

"We met at the Fennenbock's last night. You gave me a cigarette from a jade-and-gold case—"

An amused smile came over her lips with an effort. "I'm afraid you have the wrong girl," she said coolly. "Nice try, but we just didn't meet at the Foofendoofers—what was that name again?" She was play acting; every expression, every gesture was overdone.

"Fennenbock," Ferrier said evenly. "You were there."

"I never heard the name before. I don't know the people. I wasn't at their party. Sorry." She pushed herself off into the water and swam past him and into the dock. Ferrier watched her climb up the ladder and enter the Tavern at a walk that needed one additional degree of fear to turn it into a run.

When he hoisted himself up on the float Janice was staring at him with speculative eyes. He jerked his head and she came over and sat beside him.

"Your call came?"

He shook his head. "I'm not going to wait. Here it is: A college acquaintance of mine from New York sent me a note asking me to meet him at a party in Grosse Pointe. I didn't know the people—and they never heard of him. He didn't show up anyhow. At the party a girl gave me a cigarette from an oddly made case. There was no significance to the incident except I remembered the case. When I stopped at the wreck of Miss Whitbeck's car thirty miles away I saw a lighter and a compact of the same design as the case in her bag. But no case to complete the set."

"A coincidence," Janice said succinctly. "Both girls have a similar set."

"That's what I thought," Ferrier agreed. "But later I found a case in my car. It could have been put there

at the party, or, if there are two sets, at the scene of the accident." He gestured at the float. "The girl I was talking to out there was the girl at the party. She denied it, but I know!"

"This is getting pretty thick, Doctor," Janice said. "What are you hoping to prove?"

Ferrier laughed almost bitterly, "Principally that I'm not losing my mind! Since the girl denied so forcibly that she was even at the Fennenbock's, I'm convinced she put the case in my car. But why?"

Janice frowned. "I don't know. You said there was no significance to the incident of her giving you the cigarette. Are you sure?"

"No," he said doubtfully. "A girl, I can't remember which one, gave me some very provocative glances. She might have been trying to get acquainted."

"Could it have been the same one who gave you the cigarette?" Janice demanded.

"Yes—it could very easily have been. They had the same color eyes. I have an unreliable memory. But what difference would it make?"

"Did you examine the case?"

"I didn't open it."

"Then there could be almost anything in it. Besides cigarettes, I mean."

FERRIER slapped himself on the forehead. "Of course! She was calling my attention to the case! Nice work—"

"Anyone but a conceited male would have thought of it," she retorted. "If you hadn't been so sure she was making eyes at you you might have thought of it last night." She made a sound of great weariness. "If there's one thing I'm fed up on—"

"I know," Ferrier said briefly, "conceited males. Let's go and get the case."

He swam in so fast that he had time to go upstairs and get the car keys before she reached the parking lot. Her face lost its disdainful expression when he took the case from the glove compartment. "Open it up," she prodded.

There were cigarettes and under them a piece of white paper, as white as the cigarettes, obvious only to someone looking for it. Ferrier unfolded it. It read:

Steve:

Unexpected development, so can't make the party. Drive up to the Old English Tavern on the river and register. I'll join you there. Sorry as hell about this, pal, but include it on your bill for professional services rendered!

Dick

"Does it make sense to you?" Janice asked.

"A little," Ferrier said. "It's one missing page. There was a note here waiting for me this morning. This explains how he knew I'd be here at the Tavern. If I'd got this last night I wouldn't have been so upset."

There was a long moment of silence and then Janice said, "You're evading the obvious, Doctor. We both know he's connected somehow with that girl's death. Two unusual events—a violent death and a disappearance—and tying them together is the cigarette case. We might as well face it. There's just one cigarette case. That's the Whitbeck girl's case right there."

"The blonde girl probably read that note he'd given her before passing it on," Ferrier said, by way of agreeing, "and came here to meet Cutler. But why did she deny everything? And where is Cutler?"

Janice pulled off her white bathing cap and shook her hair loose. "I don't know, Doctor. Seems to me you'll just have to wait till Cutler contacts you. He sounds like a screwball anyway, writing all these cryptic little notes. Who or what is he?"

"He worked in some New York investment office before the war," Ferrier said. "I hadn't heard from him since college till that first note came. In fact, I'd probably have forgotten him completely except his name came up several times in connection with the war. We had a mutual friend in the Coast Guard and" He broke off so sharply that

Janice stared at him.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Nothing," he said, shaking his head. "Nothing important." He hoped it wasn't important; he earnestly hoped so. What he had so abruptly remembered was what Cutler had done in the service. For a time he had been engaged in training the K-9 Corps. The dogs of war, taught to attack and kill enemy soldiers....

And Ferrier, thinking of Allison Whitbeck's torn throat, remembered that Cutler had written his first note the day before her death! Had he known even then of strange, unnamable impulses that he could not control? Had he tried, a little too late, to get to Ferrier, whose knowledge of the dark ways of the human mind might save him from some horrible crime? Even Ferrier, who could no longer be shocked or surprised by the things that happened to the mind, shuddered at the picture of what had occurred in that grove of maple trees.....

CHAPTER IV

FERRIER waited all afternoon for the blonde girl to reappear. She was in Room 31 and had signed the register as Miss Beverly Watson of Detroit. Janice had gotten that information in crisp, efficient fashion. "Very simple for an old newspaper-woman," she had said.

Shortly afterwards, having refused all invitations, she left to go back to her trailer. Ferrier had the unhappy conviction that she intended to move on to some more remote spot where her privacy would not be invaded by men. He wondered moodily what had given her that phobia....

At four o'clock no call had come from Cutler, and Beverly Watson was still in her room. Ferrier was tired of inaction. With the jade-and-gold cigarette case in his hand he went upstairs and knocked on the door of Room 31. When it opened he had a flash of intuition and, extending the case toward the girl, said, "Your property, I believe—Miss Whitbeck."

"Yes—no," she floundered. "My

name isn't...."

"Of course it is," Ferrier said sharply. She was, he realized on the ragged edge of hysteria. She was simply a patient. He treated her as such. "I think you'd better tell me about it. I may be able to help you. You are Allison's—sister?"

She nodded miserably, her shield of exaggerated histrionics completely gone. "Come in . . . How did you know who I was?"

"You were the missing link, so to speak. You had Allison's case—and Cutler's note. That meant you knew them both. The name Watson you used on the register has the same initial as Whitbeck, so it was merely a matter of putting things together. Now do you want to tell me about it?"

"I can't tell you very much," she said. Her young, pretty face was frightened and woebegone. Ferrier judged her to be less than twenty. "I don't know every much . . . Have you got a cigarette?"

Ferrier opened her own case for her. "Why did you try to deceive me—about the party and this case and the rest of it?"

"I don't know—I was so confused. When I heard about Allison's accident I rushed up here to see Dick, and he wasn't here. I couldn't understand it, especially when you were here. I didn't know then whether I could trust you. I wanted to see Dick before I talked to anyone else."

"What is your connection with Cutler?"

"I—just know him. He was a friend of Allison's, I think. Or maybe a business associate of my father's. I don't really know. The house was always full of Allison's admirers. I never liked any of them and no one ever paid any attention to me. Dick seemed—different."

"Where do you think Cutler is?"

"I don't know. The last time I saw him was last night when he came to the house to pick Allison up for the party. She wasn't home. That seemed to upset him. He gave me the note and a description of you and told me to slip it to you unobtrusively. Then he rushed off. I haven't seen nor heard from him since."

"Why did he want to see me?"

She hesitated, "I don't know."

"Don't you?"

"No." She forced herself to meet his gaze. "He didn't tell me—nobody ever tells me anything!"

FERRIER brooded about it for several minutes. Then he asked, "What about Allison's death?"

She gave him a hot, resentful look. "I know what you're thinking—that I should be home now. But I never stay home much since my mother died...we were good pals. And I can't do Allison any good—I'm not even sure I would if I could. I didn't like my sister, Doctor Ferrier! She was selfish, egotistic and cruel. She was just interested in her own pleasures and she didn't care whom she hurt. She had Pete Vickery almost out of his mind, and she was starting to work on Dick—!"

"Who is Pete Vickery?"

"Her fiance—but that doesn't mean she ever intended to marry him. She took him in because he would spend lots of money on her."

Ferrier showed his surprise. "But I thought you were a wealthy family."

Beverly got another cigarette from her case and lit it. She smoked with an immature heedlessness. "I suppose my father has lots of money—he lost some just before he retired. Allison wouldn't have any of her own till she was thirty. Both of us inherit two hundred and fifty thousand from our grandmother when we're thirty. Allison was twenty-nine. I'm nineteen," she added with unaffected candor.

"Did your father give Allison an allowance?"

"Yes, but it was never enough. They were always fighting about it." Beverly's face was grim. "She knew where to get more when she needed it."

"From Pete Vickery?" Ferrier asked.

Beverly hesitated. "No, he'd buy her anything she wanted—like the station wagon, but he said it wasn't proper for him to give her money.

She used to laugh about that behind his back."

"Where did she get money?" Ferrier persisted. He was getting a picture of Allison Whitbeck that made the possibility of her death being murder all the more logical. Allison's character was the type that fairly bred murder.

Beverly lit her third cigarette from the stub of her last one and said, "She got money from a man named Neece. He has a night club out on the Eight Mile Road. It's a gambling place, too. Allison spent a lot of time there. I know of two occasions that she borrowed quite a bit of money from him."

"Against her inheritance," Ferrier reasoned. "It would be a fairly good gamble. He could collect when Allison was thirty."

Beverly shot a dramatic sideways glance. "She wouldn't think twice about refusing to pay off her debts if she could get away with it. She simply didn't have any principles!"

"I'd like to know," Ferrier mused slowly, "just what Neece has in the way of legal notes for those debts."

If he had nothing to take to court to force her to pay him, her death wouldn't be any great loss. In fact, he might stand a better chance of collecting from Allison's father, whose sense of honor might be higher.

BEVERLY WAS quiet for a long time, and then, without looking at him, she said, "I don't know much about my father's financial condition. If—" she had to make an effort to continue, "if it's important in any way—to help Dick, I mean—you might get some information from Mr. Jelke. He was my father's partner during the war. He had to retire because of poor health—that's what they said. I know there was trouble between them."

"All right," Ferrier said quietly. He had a fairly good understanding now of this young, repressed girl. Since her mother's death she had been forgotten and neglected at home. Dick Cutler, by some small attentions, had completely won her over.

It might be profitable, he thought, to check on Jelke and to pay Neece a visit. If the dog which had attacked Allison had been urged on by some human, any lead that involved someone else was of that much more value to Dick Cutler. If it was murder, and if Cutler was the murderer, Ferrier had no intentions of helping him. But he did intend to see that Cutler received justice.

He left Beverly shortly after she had told him her plans were to stay at the Tavern until Dick reappeared. Tomorrow, of course, she would have to go home for Allison's funeral but she would return directly after. She made Ferrier promise to keep her informed of all developments—particularly if Cutler should phone.

Ferrier's hopes that the call would come were fast slipping. It was five hours over due now.

A half-hour later Ferrier swung off the highway where Janice's trailer was still parked. He followed the faint tracks on the grass left by her car up to the trailer and honked his horn.

Immediately she emerged from the trailer, closing the door behind her. "It's you," she said in a discouraging tone. She was wearing her paint-daubed slacks and green shirt again. "Now what do you want?"

"How would you like to go to dinner at a night club on the Eight Mile Road tonight?"

"No, thanks."

"You ought to have some social life."

She came over and rested her arm on the door of the car. "Look, doctor. I'm not interested in changing my life, socially or otherwise. I have it ordered exactly the way I want it. I come and go as I wish. I keep the hours I like best. If I wanted to include night clubbing, I'd have done done that long ago."

"Please," Ferrier said.

"No, I'm sorry. It's nothing personal, doctor, believe me. You certainly have a kind of guileless charm that appeals to me, and no doubt an interesting mind. But I'm—just—not—interested."

Ferrier said casually, "The owner

of this night club had been financing Allison Whitbeck until she could claim a quarter of a million dollar inheritance on her thirtieth birthday."

Janice had her mouth open to continue her refusal. She closed it, sighed faintly, and said, "You are also resourceful, doctor.... I'll be at the Tavern—in a white dress—at six o' clock."

"Seeing you in a dress will be an interesting experiment in itself," Ferrier said, and pulled on past her.

He went back to his room to dress and found a note under his door. It said simply:

*Samuel Jelke. Riverview Rest Home.
Randolph 17831*

On a sudden impulse Ferrier put a call through right then and presently Jelke was on the phone. Ferrier managed to lend the impression that he was a newsman wanting an additional data on Allison's father for a follow-up on her death.

"Whitbeck and I are no longer associated," Jelke said. He spoke in a strained voice that had no individuality about it. "I withdrew nearly a year before our corporation collapsed. My health," he added.

"Would you say that Mr. Whitbeck was in good financial shape?" Ferrier asked.

"All his money was invested," Jelke said, "and went down with the rest of the financial empire." He used the pompous term naturally, as if that was just what it had been. "He's penniless!"

"Did you know Miss Whitbeck—the one who was killed?"

Jelke said evenly, "Of course, I knew her. I knew all the family—all about them."

"Well—thank you," Ferrier said, and broke off the conversation. The strange weight of depression such as he had felt last night had returned. And he didn't understand it.

AN HOUR later he was sitting in Neece's dimly-lit night club. Janice, in her white dress, looked like an entirely different person. She was as much the glamor girl as she had been an artist the day Ferrier first saw her. She hummed the song being

played with amazing restraint by the orchestra. She was like a chameleon, able to take on the characteristics of her background. Ferrier watched her gloomily, baffled by her inconsistencies. He didn't know which—or rather what—was the real Janice.

While they had a late dinner, she brought him up to date on the newspaper accounts. There'd been a small piece in the late edition about the funeral. The theory that Allison had been attacked by a wolf had been discredited. A mad dog had been suggested, but the coroner had denied any evidence that the animal had been rabid. It was not even definite, he'd admitted under questioning, that it had been an animal. It could have been almost anything. He was going to wait for the inquest before making any more statements.

Considering the prominence of the dead girl and the bizarre manner in which she had met her death, there had been surprisingly little in the papers. "Hushed up?" Ferrier asked.

"Those things do happen in our free press," she said cynically. "The question is who? The family, or the police?"

"I don't know," Ferrier admitted. "I wish I did. . . Tell me something Did you quit the newspaper business because of a man?"

"Men, Doctor! In the plural. It was a man's world, at least, that particular city room was. Oh, they didn't resent me. Every man in the place loved me—they said so. They waited on me hand and foot. They worried about me. . . And they resolutely kept me out of the rough, tough life of a newsman! I got so fed up on being a fragile female, I walked out one day and never went back. . . That's the case history of Janice Saunders, and please leave it alone! I'm happy now."

"Are you?" Ferrier asked, and without waiting for an answer beckoned to the headwaiter who was passing their table. "Would you tell Mr. Neece we'd like to see him?"

"I'm sorry, sir," the headwaiter said urbanely. "There's no one here by that name."

Janice's tone matched his. "Tell

him it concerns Allison Whitbeck."

The man's eyes went from her face to Ferrier's and back again. "I'll see," he said.

IN LESS THAN ten minutes a slender man of medium height approached the table, smiled vaguely and sat down. "I'm Walter Neece," he said courteously.

His tanned face was faintly familiar but Ferrier couldn't place it. He decided on a blunt approach. "I understand that you advanced Miss Whitbeck several sums of money, to be repaid when she received her inheritance."

Neece smiled again, an effortless, most absent-minded smile. "A man in my position has to expect a great deal of loose speculation about himself. You'd be surprised at some of the idle talk there is about me. Miss Whitbeck was a patron of my club. Her death is a great loss to the community. You may quote me."

"We aren't reporters," Ferrier said. "If you have the proper papers to show that you did lend her money I think you can expect the estate to pay the debt."

"Do you represent the estate?" Neece asked, dark eyes wary now.

"Let's say I'm a friend of the family's," Ferrier answered, still trying to remember where he had seen Neece before.

"Then this isn't official?"

"No," Ferrier admitted.

Neece smiled again, chasing away the calculating expression from his eyes. "If I had any claims on Miss Whitbeck's heirs or estate, I'd present them in a legal manner."

Simultaneously, something clicked in Ferrier's mind. He said, "Didn't I see you at the scene of the accident Saturday night? Your car was parked just ahead of mine on the side of the road."

The music from the orchestra seemed suddenly less restrained. It intruded on the little space of silence.

"No," Neece stated flatly. "I wasn't out of here until the Club closed, Sunday morning." He leaned forward. "A man in my position has to be careful about loose talk. Rumors start so

easily. All you'd have to say, in the right places, is you saw somebody that looked like me at the accident. The first thing you'd know, people would be sure it was me. That would be bad publicity for my club." He smiled again. "You couldn't blame me if I resented that, could you?"

He stood up and bowed vaguely, and, without waiting for an answer, walked away.

Janice blew out her breath audibly, "Shades of Chicago!"

"I think he was there Saturday night," Ferrier said.

"Maybe he was. But you'd better forget about it, sonny. Or don't you know a warning when you hear one?"

"I thought he was rather badly frightened," Ferrier said pensively. "The palms of his hands were quite damp with perspiration, did you notice? He's involved, somehow. His claims on the Whitbecks won't stand up in court and he's going to bluff it out. Maybe he thought he stood a better chance of getting the money from the estate than from Allison, so he killed her."

"Speaking about getting killed, doctor," Janice said seriously. "It could happen to you. That little man is dangerous!"

"Nonsense!" Ferrier said. "He's a coward. He might order a killing or do it himself if sufficiently worked up to the moment. But he hasn't the courage to plan a murder and carry it through. He isn't the type."

"Just don't give him any excuse to plan yours. He just might carry it out!" Janice's lovely face was definitely concerned. "With all due respect to your ability at psychoanalysis, I don't think you ought to bet your life on it."

"Don't worry about it," Ferrier said, "though I appreciate your interest. It shows I'm beginning to make an impression."

She gave him a queer, baffled look and said, "What are you going to do now?"

"I think I'll go see Wysorek first thing in the morning."

"Who—oh, the man at the farm. You know, he tried to charge me five dollars to park near that grove, and

I don't think he even owns it! . . . Why are you going to call on him?"

"Because I think he was watching all the activity at the accident last night. He might have noticed Neece there. I had the distinct impression, when I talked to Wysorek, that he'd seen me before. It could only be when I was stopped there. I'd have remembered if I'd ever seen *him* before."

"I thought you had an unreliable memory."

"It is, in some respects. It's a trick memory. I never forget a face, but I can't always place it in the correct background." He grinned ruefully. "I often rush up to greet a familiar face, only to find out it's a barber who shaved me two years ago. And he hasn't any idea who I am. . . . Do you want to come up to the farm with me?"

"No, thanks. I don't like that man and I refuse to get involved in this."

"Well, I'll drop in tomorrow and let you know what I find out."

She just looked at him, and he had the feeling that she was contemplating a swift flight during the night.

The thought upset him more than he wanted to admit.

CHAPTER V

AT ELEVEN o'clock the following morning, Ferrier drove past Adam Wysorek's aluminum-painted mailbox but he didn't stop. Beverly Whitbeck was in the car with him.

She had been waiting in the lobby when Ferrier came down for breakfast. She accepted his invitation to join him but had only a cup of coffee. Ferrier knew that she was burdened with some knowledge that was too big, too portentous for her. He had sensed that when he first talked to her yesterday. Now she was steeling herself, he thought, to tell him.

Instead, she said, "Dr. Ferrier, will you do me a favor?"

"If I can," he said, smiling at her.

"My—my car isn't working and I have to drive down to Grosse Pointe for the funeral. Will you—take me?" she added hastily. "You won't need to attend the service. Just—be nearby."

Ferrier hesitated briefly. He was not morbid but he had a natural aversion to funerals. On the other hand Beverly needed someone, and with Cutler still missing Ferrier was her only resort. And with the possibility looming ever larger that Cutler too was dead, Ferrier's sympathy was all with this lonely girl. She was lying about her car but he understood. "All right," he agreed.

"Thank you," she breathed, playing for the good of her own battered ego.

And, anyway, Ferrier thought now, he could see Wysorek any time.

The Whitbeck home was an immense, old-fashion structure on spacious grounds that showed lack of care. At the door was a man whom Ferrier at first mistook for the undertaker. He wore a black suit, and his white, bloodless face beneath dead-black hair had some of the same funeral expression usually attributed to morticians. He was Grover, the Whitbeck's only servant.

"Get Dr. Ferrier a drink," Beverly told him. "I'll see if Father can see us."

"What can I get you?" Grover asked Ferrier when Beverly had left the room. His tone was faintly insolent and his eyes resented Ferrier.

"Sherry, if you have it," Ferrier said.

Grover busied himself over a decanter. "Miss Beverly say you were a doctor?"

"Yes, I'm a doctor."

"This is a professional call?"

"Not at all," Ferrier said curtly. "Why?"

"Oh, no reason," Grover assured him. "I've worked for Mr. Whitbeck for many years and I try to know what's going on."

"So I see," Ferrier's tone was dry.

Grover's voice was bitter. "I wasn't always a butler. I was office manager for Whitbeck and Jelke. When Mr. Whitbeck retired I stayed with him."

"Such loyalty is rare," Ferrier said, and received a glare that vanished as Beverly came back.

"Father will see you," she said, and broke off as a black-haired young man came into the room. He

looked at Ferrier and Beverly without actually seeing them. Beverly said, "Hello, Pete."

THE MAN stared at her dully, so sunk in his own misery that he seemed unable to think of anything else. Finally, with an effort, he fumbled for an answer and came out with, "Hello, Bev."

"Is everything all right, Pete?"

Again he had to think a moment before her words had any meaning for him at all. Then he said, "All right, Bev. I took care of all the funeral arrangements."

"It was good of you," Beverly said softly and he nodded blankly and went on toward the rear of the house.

"Allison's fiance?" Ferrier asked.

"Yes. He's taking it hard. He knew what a tramp she was but it didn't make any difference. I mean he hated it but he couldn't seem to stay away from her."

"What does he do?"

"I don't think he works much. He has offices downtown but he spends most of his time sailing his yacht or raising pure bred dogs or things like that."

"What kind of dog?" Ferrier asked carefully.

"Skye Terriers mostly. Come this way."

Duncan Whitbeck had snowy-white hair and a face as red as high blood pressure could give him. He was a large man, grown heavy through the waist and neck. His age would be about sixty-five, Ferrier calculated. But there was something distinctly immature about his features. His mouth was weak, almost petulant, below a nose so finally modelled it might have been a woman's. He had white eyebrows and lashes which, coupled with the neutral shade of blue eyes, made the upper part of his face seem entirely without strength of character.

He was sitting in a big leather chair near an empty fireplace. The room was gloomy and dusty, and lined with books. He stood up automatically as Beverly said, "Father, this is Steve Ferrier."

Whitbeck made a slight bow. "Mr. Ferrier." He sounded as if he were addressing someone not even in the room.

Ferrier noticed that Beverly didn't call attention to his profession. He said awkwardly, "May I offer my sympathy—"

"Thank you," Whitbeck said, in his empty voice. He didn't look at Ferrier. "Were you a friend of Allison's? She had many friends. And many enemies, too. She was my daughter, sir, but I wasn't blind to the fact that she had her faults. Perhaps I knew them better than anyone." He seemed to retreat momentarily into some brooding preoccupation of his own. Then, still talking to someone who wasn't there, he went on, "She loved money. It was her god. I'm afraid money meant far more to her than did her parent. I don't like to talk about her this way, but we must face the truth. She wanted money from me, that's all."

FERRIER shifted uneasily but Whitbeck didn't notice. He was alone in that gloomy, depressing room. "She would have taken all my money. Every cent! But now she won't. She'll never get anything now." He stared triumphantly at Ferrier. "Neither will anyone else. You can tell Jelke his tricks won't work. I'm on to them. He won't get a cent. Not a cent of my money. I'm much too clever for him."

Ferrier shot a glance at Beverly. She met his gaze with sick eyes, begging for hope where no hope existed.

"I appreciate your position in this matter," he told Ferrier gravely, "but, you see, it doesn't matter. I'm protected, completely protected. You've done your best, sir, I only regret that it should have been wasted on behalf of that scoundrel Jelke."

His voice rose in sudden rage. "Call Grover, Beverly, and have Mr. Ferrier shown out. You're all in this, all of you. But you're wasting your time. You'll never take my money from me. Allison tried, but she failed. Jelke will meet with the same!"

Ferrier turned and walked out of

the room without an answering word. There was nothing to be said or done; at least not here, not now. But at last he knew what had caused his own sense of depression. Since the very start, ever since he had had that moment of doubt about his own sanity, he had *felt* that somewhere in this tangled tragic situation was the presence of real madness. He had known intuitively that a mind full of dark and twisted thoughts was at work. He'd suspected Dick Cutler, but it wasn't Cutler—

Beverly caught up to him.

"Is he—?" She couldn't bring herself to say the word.

"He has a persecution complex," Ferrier said carefully. He knew now why she had contrived to get him here. He was a psychiatrist. "I—couldn't add to that without a complete examination."

"Please, doctor," she pleaded, "tell me what you think."

Ferrier hesitated. Then he said, "He's a paranoic. There are signs of delusions of personal greatness, perhaps even hallucinations."

"Is it serious?" Heartsick as she was, the dramatic impact of the situation brought out her little tricks of play-acting. "I mean is he—dangerous?"

"I don't know," Ferrier said quietly, looking back at the closed door "I'd have to observe him over a period of time."

"But it's—possible, isn't it?"

"It's always possible," Ferrier admitted. They were both avoiding the word, but it was there like a ticking time bomb: *homicidal*. She feared that her father had, by one means or another, killed his own daughter.

After a long minute, she said, "I guess—I have to go now. Don't wait for me, Doctor. I'll take a bus back. Finish your drink. I'll—see you at the Tavern."

SHE SLIPPED out of the room. Ferrier stood there a moment, then silently went to the door connecting Duncan Whitbeck's study. He could hear the man's empty monotone and at first thought he was talking to himself or to some creature of

his deranged mind. Then it came to him that he was phoning. Straining, Ferrier tried to pick up a few words.

"....just follow my instructions, Adam!" Whitbeck was saying passionately. "I want no stock put on that farm. Goodbye, Adam!"

Quietly, Ferrier moved toward the front door. For what reason had Whitbeck called Adam Wysorek? What connection was there between this paranoid ex-industrialist and a shiftless, unimportant, little farmer?

Grover the butler came from nowhere to open the door. His eyes were venomous. "What did you mean by that remark about loyalty?"

"What do you think I meant?" Ferrier snapped. "Is your conscience bothering you? Then abruptly, "What did Whitbeck and Jelke fall out over?"

Grover looked sharply at him. "Mr. Jelke's health failed."

"Was there any connection between Jelke and Allison?"

"He's old enough to be her father. They hated each other." He stopped suddenly, as if that last had slipped out. "If there was any business connection I know nothing of it," he said rigidly.

"Then there couldn't have been," Ferrier grunted and strode out.

At the first service station Ferrier stopped and phoned the Tavern to ask if there'd been any messages for him. There hadn't; Cutler was still missing, and chills skipped along Ferrier's backbone. If his belief was correct, that Duncan Whitbeck was a mad killer using a war dog as a weapon to kill those whom his twisted mind told him were his enemies, then Cutler's continued absence implied that he too was a victim.

Ferrier swung onto the river road, full of helpless confusion. What about Neece, the night club owner? Until it was established that Allison, alive, was financially important to Neece, then he couldn't be eliminated. Or for that matter could Pete be assumed innocent? His emotions had clearly taken a beating from Allison's ways. And what about Jelke? There was a lot more to that situation than there seemed. Jelke

hated Whitbeck for some unknown reason and it wasn't impossible that he was hitting at his former partner through his family. In that case, he might not stop with Allison....

Ferrier realized his limitations as a detective, and yet what more could he do? Take his story to the police? And tell them what? All he actually knew was that Dick Cutler was missing since Allison's death. To tell the police that Duncan Whitbeck showed obvious signs of being psychotic would be utterly pointless. Ferrier was morally certain that Allison's death was murder but he couldn't prove it. Until after the inquest tomorrow he had nothing to go on.

APPROACHING the site of Janice Saunder's trailer, Ferrier automatically slowed down. It was still there. Apparently her curiosity hadn't permitted her to move on yet. Ferrier turned off the highway, following his previous dusty tracks on the grass. It was just five o'clock by his watch.

There was no light in the trailer and Janice's car was not in sight. He knocked on the side of the trailer. There was no answer. She might have gone to the Tavern to see him, he thought, and drove on. It struck him then that he had never seen the inside of the trailer....

She was not at the Tavern. Neither was Beverly Whitbeck. No call had come from Cutler. Ferrier went in to dinner, and couldn't eat. His stomach was a hard knot. He was depressed beyond any reason he could imagine. Something was going to happen.

If he could find one single lead to Cutler. To his body, if he were dead, to his hideout, if he had one. Anything, *anything* to cut through to the crux of this whole muddle. He knew that to lay everything to Whitbeck's mental condition was an over-simplification. There was just too many people involved: Cutler, Whitbeck, Neece, Jelke, Pete Vickery, even Grover and Adam Wysorek. Perhaps others. And what was the one common denominator—the missing some-

thing that bound them together irrevocably?

Ferrier went back outside and got his car. Janice should be back now. Maybe she could suggest something....

She wasn't there. Or at least she wasn't answering any knocks on her door. Frowning he went back to his car. If she were out, he wondered where....

Forty minutes later he came to the lane leading up to Adam Wysorek's farm. Darkness had set in, and a pinpoint of light marked the farmhouse. Ferrier drove into the back yard.

It was the quietest farm he ever remembered being on. The absence of any stock or even a creaking windmill left the burden of night sounds to the crickets in the weeds between the house and barn. Ferrier wondered all at once if Wysorek had vital information too long delayed in coming out.

But the time had come. Ferrier crossed the yard and knocked on the screen door. The kitchen was lighted but the farmer was not there.

Ferrier knocked again and called. His voice was loud and irreverent in the stillness. There was only the song of the crickets in the still darkness.

Abruptly, he cocked an ear toward the barn. There might have been a call from out there. "Anyone there?" he called again, aiming his call in that direction this time.

The answer was faint but distinctly an answer. Ferrier started picking his way toward the barn, peering into the darkness beyond the limits of the light streaming from the kitchen door. The barn door was open like the mouth of a cave which had never known light. There was the stale smell of manure and animals no longer there. Ferrier paused in the doorway. On the opposite side of the barn a pair of double doors made a frame for a patch of not-quite-so dark night and a few early stars. Ferrier heard the sound again, and despite his professional, trained callousness to suffering, his blood turned to ice water. There in the black cavern of that unused barn

someone was dying. And Ferrier knew, without knowing how he knew, that it was a horrible, violent death. He knew inescapably that it was murder again.

And there was no way of telling that the killer was not still in there.

If he only had a flashlight. A match would help. Fumbling, he got one out, struck it. Its flare made a pitifully small gleam in the vast depth of the barn. He couldn't see anything from there. He'd have to go in. But his legs wouldn't carry him a single step ahead. He'd never before analyzed his store of courage. He'd never before encountered stark, raw fear.

He realized in that moment that he didn't know all his emotions. He didn't know his capacity for anything—for fearing, hating, loving... loving Janice Saunders and needing her so terribly right now.

He wondered even in that freezing moment just what degree of courage it required to go to the barn. Would even a dashing, dare-devil like Dick Cutler have been able to do it?

Panic stirred within him, gripped him hard. The man might not yet be dead. He was badly hurt but perhaps not beyond help. Ferrier did the only thing within the limitations of his funk. He ran back to his car. He turned on the key, fumbling with the starter button. He got the car in motion toward the barn. The headlights, stabbing into the depths of the barn, cutting through that sinister, dreaded blackness brought him more relief than he would have ever thought possible.

The murderer was gone. Adam Wysorek was in a far corner, against the wall. He was on his side, as if trying to gain leverage with his back to struggle to his feet. He had fought well, to the very end. His ripped clothing, the torn flesh off his arms and chest, showed that he had protected his throat as long as strength remained. But his strength had gone; the killer had finally, inevitably reached its target. The last sound Ferrier had heard had been the final breath of life gurgling in what was

left of Wysorek's throat. Nothing except an animal could have done that to him....

Ferrier turned away and was wretchedly and horribly ill.

CHAPTER VI

BY DAYLIGHT the posse had formed in the kitchen of the farmhouse. There were thirty or more, Ferrier estimated, silent grim-faced men with rifles and shot-guns, even a few revolvers. The State Police were in command. They issued sawed-off shotguns to those who had no weapons. Ferrier accepted his with misgiving; he never fired anything larger than a target pistol.

"You men know this country better than I do," the trooper was saying. "So I haven't any instructions, except...*be careful*. This animal—dog, wolf, whatever it is—is a killer. Don't let it get close to you. Shoot first! Now, we're going to beat the grove to make sure it isn't there. Then we'll go over to the bush to the south of here. Spread out, but don't get out of sight of the man to your right. My men will be on the flanks. Remember, don't take any chances!"

They spread out in a long line. Ferrier saw a familiar face and gravitated toward it. He couldn't place the man at first, couldn't fit it into the proper background. He was too weary to try. He'd been up all night, answering questions for the State Police, telling all that he dared, but holding back about Dick Cutler's disappearance and his own suspicion that a human mind was back of the man-killing animal. Stumbling toward the grove, he didn't quite know why he hadn't told everything. The thing was too big for him. And yet he was in such a unique position of looking down, as it were, upon a hidden vortex that was slowly drawing so many people into itself that once he brought the police into his confidence, his advantage would be gone.... He was rationalizing, he knew; the truth was that he was in too deep. He had to follow it through on his own.

The posse was into the grove now, into the alternate shafts of morning sun streaming through the leaves of the trees, and the mottled shadows that seemed to move like crouching beasts. Ferrier tried to focus his red-rimmed eyes. The shot-gun was ready in his shaking hands. The man to his right, the one Ferrier knew but couldn't place, seemed to be talking to himself. They came out into full sunshine with an abruptness that startled Ferrier. The long line of spaced men had passed through the now, before them was a wide brown grove from one side to the other and, now, before them was a wide brown stubbled field extending to the edge of the main woods. From a distance, the trees appeared to be so closely set that it was sheer wall rising up from the edge of the field.

THE ANIMAL was in there. Ferrier would have liked to rest now. But the line didn't halt. The man on his right was still mumbling to himself. Who was he? Ferrier thought, and made himself concentrate.... Pete Vickery, Allison Whitbeck's bedevilled fiance....

The yell came from somewhere down the line, but the animal was almost directly ahead, just emerging from the dark line of the woods. The sun, slanting its rays down the length of the field between the woods and grove behind the posse, picked up the darker brown of the dog's coat from the dun-colored stubble.

After that first startled yell, silence settled back down on the clearing. The dog had halted at the sound, and stood poised and uncertain, a hundred feet or more away, its muzzle lifted toward them as if searching for a scent. It was a German Shepherd, Ferrier saw, a magnificent animal in proportion, broad through the chest, great head....but it—

Ferrier half turned toward Pete Vickery, his mouth open to speak. That was when the dog unfroze from its position and in that way Ferrier saw both the dog's motions from the corner of his eyes and saw Vickery move too. Ferrier didn't have time

even to understand the meaning of either movement when Vickery's gun went off, twice, three times, the echos rolling, clamorous and shocking across the quiet, sunlit field.

Ferrier didn't watch after the dog's first convulsive rearing back as the charge hit him full in the massive chest....

Janice was sitting in the lobby of the Tavern when Ferrier came wearily in out of the dazzling sun. He didn't see her until she spoke. "I heard it on the radio," she said. "The scare is over. You were there, I take it. Tell me about it."

"Allison's boyfriend got him," Ferrier said heavily.

Janice nodded. "That's what I heard. I guess he was nearly crazy with grief and lost his head. Shot the thing three times."

Ferrier just nodded.

"What's the matter? she demanded. "Why are you looking like that?"

The words came out with a burst.

"The dog wagged its tail! Don't you understand? Just before Vickery fired, the dog started to trot toward us, *wagging his tail!*" Ferrier shook himself and his voice had regained some control when he said, "Janice, that was the wrong dog!"

Janice stared at him incredulously. "It couldn't have been!"

"It was a German Shepherd....It was brown and tan or whatever color the average police dog is. Does that sound like the dog you saw?"

"No. No, of course not."

"It wasn't black," Ferrier said harshly. "It wasn't a Great Dane. And it wasn't wild or mad, or even unfriendly. It wagged its tail at us!"

"That means the wild one is still out there?" Janice asked. "Is that it?"

Ferrier looked down at his dirty, shaking hands. "Not necessarily. And that's what frightens me. Janice, I've got fear in my stomach like a cramp! There's a mind so cunning, so intricately clever behind this that the police don't even suspect its presence. The dog we shot was planted there. The murderer knew that after the second death there'd be a search made, so he planted another dog

there to close the case and take the spotlight off his crimes."

"How are you going to prove that?"

"I don't know. I can't prove it. It's only a combination of fortuitous events we know that there is a murderer. If Cutler hadn't communicated with me before he disappeared, if you hadn't painted the dog in that field, and if Beverly Whitbeck hadn't given me some information about her sister, we wouldn't have been any more aware of murder than the police are."

"What's the information about Allison?"

"I don't know. I mean, I don't understand its significance. It's just a lot of confused bits about her that don't fit a pattern. But the pattern's there....even if I can't go to the police and tell them. They wouldn't believe any part of it. It's fantastic! A murderer using a dog to kill for him. It's a nice thought, isn't it?" he asked bitterly. "A maniac with a man-killing dog loose on the countryside."

"It gives me the screaming meemies," Janice said in a weak voice. "Why was Wysorek killed, I wonder. Did he see the dog too? Or did he know Neece was in the crowd at the accident?"

FERRIER LAUGHED without humor. "Here is an even tougher one. Duncan Whitbeck called Wysorek yesterday and ordered him not to put any stock on the farm. And incidentally, Whitbeck is a paranoid."

"What are you going to do?" Janice whispered. "If your theory is right, this isn't the end. You can't just sit back and wait!"

"No," Ferrier admitted. "I'll do something." But he knew what he was going to do. The one thing he had proof of was Duncan Whitbeck's condition. At least he could force some action there, and if the man's derangement was at the bottom of the killings it would stop further murders.

But Ferrier didn't know it was Whitbeck. There were too many

others, the missing Cutler, Walter Neece; Jelke, just a strange, unnatural voice on the phone; Pete Vickery, who intentionally or otherwise had made sure that no one would learn that the dog was friendly and not a killer. Then there was Grover, who was something more than a butler, Beverly Whitbeck, a repressed, even neurotic girl.

"There was even Janice Saunders of whom Ferrier knew nothing for sure....

Beverly Whitbeck had returned to the Tavern during the night, the desk clerk told Ferrier, but she was out now. Ferrier left a message for her and went up to his room. He meant to sleep only two or three hours, but his exhaustion was so great that he didn't wake till late afternoon. He got up, showered and shaved, and dressed. Downstairs, the clerk said Beverly had come in, received his message, and gone out again.

Ferrier had dinner and then waited in the lobby for Beverly to come back.

She didn't come until eleven o'clock and apparently was on her way upstairs to bed when Ferrier called to her. "May I talk to you?"

She didn't meet his gaze. "I'm rather tired. Tomorrow...?"

"It's important," Ferrier said.

"Doctor Ferrier," she said dramatically, playacting again, I..I have nothing to talk over with you. I wish you would leave me alone." She broke off and started upstairs. She was almost running when she reached the top.

Ferrier watched her go, his face white. He knew that she wouldn't be here in the morning; sometimes during the night she was going to check out. Perhaps she sensed the fact that her father's time was running out. She might, he thought, hope to avoid the public knowledge of his crimes by quietly committing him to a private institution. But could she handle it alone? Wouldn't Whitbeck turn on her too? Or was that her plan?

Was someone else marked for murder tonight? Ferrier's helplessness was overpowering. She'd be down as

soon as the coast was clear, he thought. He went out onto the verandah. The door was always open. He moved a wicker arm chair to the edge of the shadows at the side of the doorway and sat down to keep guard on the lobby. It wouldn't be long, he thought.

He'd act then. He'd do something.

A CHURCH CLOCK struck twelve, the sounds rolling, muted by distance, out over the water. A fish leaped playfully in the long reflections of a dock-light. At one o'clock the dock lights went out. Ferrier smoked cigarettes and fought drowsiness. Maybe he had guessed wrong..Maybe while he was tied here, the murderer was on the loose again....

He must have dozed. Some instinct or some sound in his sleep-dimmed consciousness brought him to wakefulness just in time to see Beverly down on the long front lawn, leading to the dock. She must have come out another way. For a moment her white dress stood plainly, and then faded toward the waterfront. Ferrier swore with unfamiliar violence.

On his feet and moving swiftly but in silence, his footsteps muffled by the grass, he headed down the sloping lawn. He was halfway to the dock, straining for a sight of that white dress. A row of shrubbery marked the limits of the hotel property and he moved over to the shadows there. Something moved on the dock..what was she doing? He started to run....

Afterwards he thought he must have decided Beverly was trying to get away by boat. It wasn't until he was into the shadows on the dock that his senses reared back in warning. It was too late then. He saw a flash of white, a sudden, startled movement and then a whispering voice saying, "Get him boy!"

The low, savage snarl bubbling in the beast's throat was all that saved Ferrier. Some atavistic reflex caused him to throw up an arm in front of his face as a huge, sleek form, black as the night, swifter than any shadow, hurtled through the air on top

of him. He had only the impression of a velvet silhouette marked against the lesser darkness of the sky, something that was all sinewy and silken motion, full of unleashed power and ferocity. Then he was down on the dock, on one arm, his fingers feeling a crack between two of the planks. With his other arm he fought against the terror that was too strong, too swift, too frightful for him to get his wits assembled. *He couldn't even see it!*

The sleeve of his coat had saved his arm in that first savage rush and, bunched between those powerful jaws, a piece of cloth torn away. For a brief instant Ferrier was free. He rolled frantically away, for one terrified moment his back turned upon the beast. He knew in a single flash of thought that he had to get on his feet, brace himself for the next charge, and meet it with his hands on the dog's throat. Even before he got his feet under him to stand up, the charge came, knocking him over, rolling him across the dock, while the dog's momentum carried him on over Ferrier's body. The blunt claws made a scrambling sound on the planks of the dock as the dog fought for traction.

Ferrier knew then how pitifully slow was his own recovery. He was never going to recover his balance, never get set. The dog was too strong, too lithe. And again from the shadows came that whispered, "Get him, boy. Kill! Kill!"

The dog was upon Ferrier again, tearing at his flesh, ripping away the slight protection of his clothes. With one hand Ferrier battled to catch the dog's throat and hold away those snapping, deadly fangs. His other arm was outflung, searching for a hold to pull himself up. His fingers found an iron cleat bolted to the dock from which yachts or motor boats might be moored. With all his strength he pulled on that, dragging himself and the squirming weight on top of him toward the edge of the pier. The dog's jaw locked on his shoulder, almost at his throat.

And then abruptly, still locked together, they were over the edge and

into the river, the world seeming to close over on top of them.

THE INSTINCTS of the expert swimmer had made Ferrier hold his breath. His head was roaring and his eyes saw only flashing lights. But the dog's grip had loosened. They broke the surface and the fangs let go completely as the animal opened his mouth and fought for air. *Underwater*, Ferrier's mind told him, and with fingers digging into the dog's short hair and loose skin, he pulled them both under again. He had the advantage there; he fought with his hands in a frenzy, his lungs full of fire. The dog, with only his jaws to fight with, was taking in water. But it was a killer, one-tracked and relentless, and it would drown fighting. It would not stop fighting. Its efforts simply subsided when there was no longer life in its great body.

Ferrier almost went to the bottom with the dead hulk before his battered mind realized it was all over. He let go then and after a time rose to the surface. The night was full of pain and fire and nausea, but he could see the stars, and the reflection of the street lights on the black mirror of the river; he could breathe air into lungs that agonized for it and burned fiercely when he gulped it in. His body was one great torture; he thought he must have struck his head on the edge of the dock as he went over, for there was pain there and it wasn't lessening, it wasn't going away.

But he wasn't dead, he was alive, and just being alive was suddenly the sweetest and most wonderful sensation he had ever experienced. He had so nearly been dead....

The current had carried him yards downstream. He couldn't do more than swim ashore. He collapsed on the soft cool ground and fainted. The faint didn't last long. It would have been more merciful if it had lasted.

But in the deep, dark corridor of his consciousness a thought was moving like a huge bell, booming one stroke after another—the murderer. There was still the killer. He was on the dock. He was gone now.

But not far. Ferrier had him. He knew he had him. That thought, ringing like a bell, was the answer to why he had him. But Ferrier couldn't grasp it. He wouldn't venture down that deep corridor and seize the thought that told him *why, why* he had the murderer. Had him cold, helpless, completely at his mercy.

FERRIER tried twice to get to his feet. The third time he made it. His shirt was strips of cloth on a chest raked with reddening furrows, where the river had washed the blood away, but hadn't stopped the bleeding. Pink water was dripping off the side of his chin and getting more red all the time. Ferrier staggered across the waterfront lawn of someone's home, his shadow in the light of the street lamp a grotesque, not human thing. And then he was back at the hedge barring him from the hotel property.

He leaned against it to rest, and the hedge caved in. He hung there while interminable waves of black nausea rolled over him. Then he crawled through the hole his body had made. He was back on the dock again. The murderer was gone. But Ferrier had him. In a minute he would think *why, how*. In a minute...

He started across the lawn to the parking lot. He didn't know why. He didn't know how, suddenly, he was in his car. He had his keys out of his trouser pocket and was fitting them into the switch. They wouldn't go. How had he got here? Where was he going? He could get the murderer any time. Any time at all. Drunk with his own power and his own weakness, he laughed, mocking the killer, mocking himself, mocking the night and the stars and the utter silence.

He had the car going. Where? To Janice of course! To tell her he could pick up the murderer any time he wanted to. He was in love with Janice. His carefully sorted, catalogued and pigeon-holed emotions were all scrambled. He loved Janice, and that was what had been wrong from the start. He had forgotten

which pigeonhole contained his love emotion.

"Who is it?" Janice was asking. What was he doing in her trailer? He had never been in here before, never even seen the inside of it. And he'd had a lot of suspicions about it, too. How had he got here? She was washing the blood away. "What happened, Steve? He thought she was crying over him and he liked that. She thought he was dying because she kept asking, "Who was it, Steve?" and that scared him. He didn't want to die. Not yet, not until he could take out his emotions and live first:

"What was it, Steve? Who—?"

He didn't know who exactly. But he knew something about him. Something that would enable him to pick him up any time. *Any time!* All he had to do was go down that long, slanting corridor, in the dark, and examine that thought. Now was the time. He started down it. It was darker than he'd thought: It was darker than anything in life or death. He was terribly frightened. He tried to scream, he was losing his way... The thought was getting away from him...the corridor had no end, like a bottomless pit...he was lost...

And then it was morning—and the thought was irretrievably gone from him.

CHAPTER VII

FERRIER SAT on the edge of Janice's bunk and tried to keep the coffee cup from rattling. He was re-living last night's fight with the dog, and now he had time to think he knew what real fear was. He couldn't stop trembling. And beneath the fear was the old sense of frustration. He didn't know what had happened to Beverly Whitbeck. He didn't know the murderer.

"I had him," he kept repeating. "I had him, any time I wanted to go out and get him. And now it's gone! I can't remember what I knew last night." He looked helplessly at Janice.

"It'll come," she said comfortingly. Something had happened to her during the night too. Her hard surface

resistance was gone. The men she had worked with in the newspaper business were, undoubtedly, quick thinking, hard-hitting men, entirely self-sufficient. While he was a blundering fool, the kind who picked up a live bomb and didn't know enough to throw it away. He needed to be looked after, and knowing that need, her attitude toward him had changed. Ferrier wasn't exactly sure he wanted it that way.

"He'll be desperate now! He knows he's out in the open at last. Whatever he's trying to do, he'll have to do it now, fast."

Ferrier got stiffly to his feet. The side of his head ached dully, but as far as he could determine without an X-ray his skull hadn't been fractured; a mild concussion probably. His shirt and coat were gone and his chest looked like fresh hamburger. But his face was unmarked, except for one scratch down past the outer end of his left eyebrow. On a spectacular person like Dick Cutler, it would have been dramatic, a battle wound. Ferrier looked like nothing more than the loser in an alley brawl.

"You're too sick to be up," Janice said when he staggered toward the door.

"I've got to be up! Don't you see, I've got to stop this thing! I'm the only one." He stumbled outside to his car. The bright morning sun was warm on his bare, mangled chest.

Janice followed. "How?" she demanded.

"I'll have to find out what's happened first. I'm going to look for Beverly." He hated himself for showing weakness, but he said, "Do you want to drive?"

"Of course... Steve, you talked a lot last night, rambling things mostly, but I gathered that Beverly Whitbeck was there when you were attacked."

He nodded wearily. "I followed her to the dock. I lost sight of her, and the next thing the murderer had set the animal on me."

JANICE swung the car around, drove to the edge of the high-

way and paused questioningly. Ferrier gestured southward. "Stop in Mt. Clemens, I want to phone. You can be getting me a shirt."

"The murderer, Steve," she watched him in the rear view mirror, "it was a man, wasn't it?"

"I don't know. I heard just a whisper. It must have been a man!"

She turned her gaze back on to the road. "Did you see Beverly again?"

"No. I don't know what happened to her."

"But if you were right behind her, you killed the dog before it could attack her. Unless, of course, the murderer got her himself..."

"I don't know," Ferrier said again, miserably. "He might have. God, what a horrible weapon! You can't appreciate it, Janice, just hearing about it. You can't fight it—you can't even see it in the dark! There's no noise, such as with a gun. The murderer doesn't have to dirty his hands by using a knife. He just stands back in the shadows and whispers, 'Kill, kill!'" He shivered again. He had no illusions about his own survival. He wasn't a heroic victor. Only his swimming skill, the fortuitous fact that water was almost his natural element had saved him.

They stopped in Mt. Clemens. Ferrier waited in the car till Janice brought him a shirt. Then he went into a drugstore and phoned the Tavern. It didn't take long. Janice questioned him with her eyes when he dropped heavily back onto the seat and pointed south again.

"She checked out last night, sometime after midnight. Before going to the dock probably. She took her bags out to the parking lot and then went on around the Tavern to the dock. Accounts for my not seeing her come through the verandah."

She digested that, and then asked, "Where are we going now?"

"Grosse Pointe. I want to find out about Beverly. Then I'm going to blow things sky high." Watching her with a steady gaze, he asked casually, "Where were you last night?"

"Detroit." A flush crept slowly up her cheeks. "I found some old friends on one of the papers there

and dug up what I could on our prime suspects. Do you want it?"

It didn't matter much now. But he had to keep from thinking, "Tell me."

"It's just a lot of little things, but it might help. First, Neece: he was arrested once for a killing, and released for lack of evidence. In other words, he did it but they couldn't prove it. He owns that night club, also a good sized yacht which he sails just for pleasure. None of this means anything alone," she explained, "but it might fill in and give you a more complete picture. Next, Whitbeck: he's really broke. Tried to go into the automobile industry right after the war, a la Henry Kaiser and lost everything. Declared bankruptcy, and went into seclusion."

"Anything on his partner, Samuel Jelke?"

"Not much. He had withdrawn some time previous to that. Bad health was the official explanation, but no one knows exactly what, or where he is now."

"I know," Ferrier said, "if it matters. Go on."

"That's about all, except for a few notes on Allison Whitbeck and her fiance, which you probably already have. Apparently she was a tramp, doubled in spades, and Vickery had been trying to reform her... Do these reformers ever kill their suspects when they realize their failure, doctor?"

"Vickery might have," Ferrier admitted moodily.

THE WHITBECK'S massive old house looked as quiet as before, almost an unlivable in look. Grover opened the door for them, and the look on his mortician face showed disbelief, then fright, finally went blank.

Ferrier asked, "Is—Beverly there?"

"No, sir," Grover said. "Mr. Vickery took Miss Beverly into the city early this morning. She became seriously ill during the night."

"Her father, then," Ferrier ordered.

"Oh, I couldn't disturb him, sir. He's—he's resting."

"At ten A.M.?" Ferrier pushed his way forward. Grover resisted momentarily, a little show of violence so quickly past that it was more an expression on his face than anything. "All right," he was breathing heavily. "All right, in the library."

"Come on, Janice," Ferrier said. He didn't bother knocking. He simply strode into the gloomy room—and stopped dead.

Janice, following behind, kept coming, pushing him on into the room and to one side. The next instant he knew she hadn't crowded him from curiosity or impetuosity. Something hard and blunt ground into his back and Grover said, "They forced their way in. I thought he was supposed to be drowned."

"Make a bad situation worse," Walter Neece said. He had turned around, his dark eyes just a little vague. Behind him Duncan Whitbeck was tied firmly in his big leather chair. He was gagged and barefooted. His red face had a pallor in it, and his pale, empty eyes were wild and tortured.

Sitting by the window was a man Ferrier had never seen before, large framed, but shrunken somehow, like one defeated and unable to comprehend defeat. He never bothered looking around to see who had come in. He was watching something through the window.

Janice had come out of a momentary paralysis. "Look, Steve! That electric iron. They've been torturing him!"

"Yes," Neece said, in a purring voice. "And that's why both of you are a problem to us now." He had a gun, too, and he took it out of his pocket almost lovingly, like a toy he wanted to play with and was somehow restrained. "You can understand our position naturally. We can't ever let you free to talk about—this."

"Get rid of them," the man at the window said flatly, without turning.

Neece's eyes threw hate at his back. "You haven't met Mr. Jelke here," he said, purring again. "Formerly Mr. Whitbeck's partner, now

mine. He agrees with me that we will have to shoot you."

JANICE'S BREATHING was little, painful gasps. She threw a look, faintly accusing, at Ferrier, reminding him that he had once analyzed Neece as lacking the courage to plan and execute murder.

"Are you going to do it?" Jelke demanded impatiently, "or do you want Grover to?"

"Why not you?" Neece said furiously. "Who has been doing all the dirty work on Whitbeck? Not you!"

Ferrier said, "And all such a waste of time. He doesn't know!"

"He—" Neece swung back on Ferrier. "What? What doesn't he know?"

"Whatever it is you're torturing him to find out. And that's why you aren't going to kill us. It won't do you any good. You'll gain nothing from it. He can't tell what he doesn't know."

"He knows," Jelke said. "And another two murders won't hurt." He turned briefly and stared at Ferrier without seeing him. He stared without seeing anyone. He couldn't see! And the thought came soaring up out of Ferrier's subconscious and burst in a flare of understanding. "In the basement, Neece," Jelke said coldly.

"Get going," Neece jerked the gun toward the door. "You won't feel anything. It happens so fast, a little squeeze on the trigger and it's all over." He was talking for his own good, Ferrier thought. Janice was swaying, her eyes closed, holding off a faint. "Go on, damn you," he snarled. "Don't make it any worse!"

"You're making it worse," Ferrier said tensely. "More killings won't hurt Jelke. He already has too much blood on his hands. He has nothing to lose. But you have! If you get out now, you're safe. You haven't any murders to hide. And Whitbeck doesn't know!"

"You're wasting time," Jelke said coldly, turning his sightless eyes back to the window. "Get it done with!"

"Just a minute," Neece shouted.

His self control was fast slipping. He wanted to be talked out of murder. "I want to hear why Whitbeck doesn't know where the money is. He's the one who hid it!"

"Look at him!" Ferrier cried. "You don't need to be a psychiatrist to see what has happened to him! His mind has snapped. He's a paranoic!" Ferrier tightened his voice, he didn't dare lose his control now. "I'm a psychiatrist. I haven't examined him, but I can tell you this much: *he doesn't know where the money is!* He was so fearful that somebody would learn his secret that he *willed* himself to forget. He hasn't any more idea where it is than you have!"

"It's on the farm some place," Neece persisted. His tanned face showed lanes of perspiration.

"There're a thousand places on that farm to hide money," Ferrier snapped. "You can torture him till he dies on your hands, but you won't get it out of him. He simply doesn't know!"

"That's what Cutler said, all right," Neece mumbled half to himself. He looked toward Jelke and the blind man seemed to sense that the situation was slipping away from him.

He screamed, "Don't listen to that stuff."

"You shut up!" Neece pointed the gun at him, then realizing the futility of that, turned it on the silent Grover, still guarding the door. "I'll take your gun," he said. "I don't know what I'm going to do yet, but whatever is done, I'll do it! Throw it over here."

GROVER hesitated. He was at a disadvantage and apparently his knowledge of guns was insufficient for him to want to shoot it out. Suddenly he tossed the gun to Neece.

"Look," Neece said to Ferrier. "What kind of a deal do you want?"

Ferrier said disdainfully, "I won't deal with you. You haven't got a trading point. Unless I miss my guess, you've got Cutler a prisoner some place, and that's kidnapping. But Jelke is a murderer twice over. He's finished, right now. Either you

get out, or you're saddled with him."

"I've got thirty-eight thousand dollars coming from somebody. That's what Allison owed me."

"Prove it in court! You've got nothing coming but an arrest for murder!"

Neece thought about it for a long while, his dark eyes darting here and there as if to aid his mind in finding a loophole. His breathing was heavy, ragged. "I'll give you Jelke if you forget the kidnapping charge."

"That's up to Cutler. He's the one to lay the charge. If I were you, I just wouldn't let the police find him on the yacht—or wherever you're holding him."

"You can't do it," Jelke shrieked. "We're partners." He flung himself away from the window, raging and incoherent. He couldn't see. He knocked over a table, then crashed into the wall. Sobbing, he stumbled in the other direction. Without his murderous animal his hate was impotent, ridiculous, shocking. . . .

Neece smashed him on the head with the side of the gun.

"The party is yours now," he told Ferrier, and moved toward the door. He said, as if the words hurt, "Thirty-eight thousand dollars!"

Two hours later Dick Cutler arrived, rumpled and unshaven but as dramatic as ever. And alive! He had flagged down a police car on the highway. He said nothing about a kidnapping; it was his word against Neece's. "Besides," he admitted to Ferrier when they were alone in Whitbeck's gloomy library, "it wasn't too rough a deal. Lots of eat and drink, good fresh air on the lake—and I won eleven dollars playing gin rummy with the guard."

"You would!" Ferrier said.

"I was worried sick. I thought you were dead!" He'd thought worse than that but he didn't say so. He was depressed again. Janice had gone back to her trailer, driven by Pete Vickery, who had returned from Detroit. Beverly was in a hospital. The shock of her experience on the dock had left her in a daze. She hadn't been able to speak, didn't seem to know or care what had happened to

her. She'd be all right in a few days.

Whitbeck had been rushed to a hospital for medical attention on his burned feet—and observation. Grover and Jelke were in jail.

"Complicated story," Cutler waved a hand. His curly hair was down on his forehead, he was picturesquely bedraggled. "Not sure of all the details myself. Allison double-crossed me the night of the party and tried to get all the money herself. You see, Whitbeck had control of her inheritance and authority to invest it as he saw fit. He'd used it to get Jelke and Whitbeck, Inc. started, and lost it all. Likewise Beverly's—there's a good kid. . . . Whitbeck had no head for business, Jelke was the brains till he had to quit."

He took a long drink of Whitbeck's sherry, made a face, and went on. "Now there's a mind you should examine, Steve. Jelke's. He started from scratch during the war, got Whitbeck to come in with him on the financial side, and soon had the makings of a first-class industrial empire. Gave him a Napoleonic complex. Thought he was the new Henry Ford. Browbeat Whitbeck into re-converting for the automobile industry. That's what did it. That and his eyes."

"He had to retire because of his blindness?"

"That's it. Seems it was coming on for a long time but he didn't dare let up, as the specialists ordered. Then one morning he woke up—and it was still night. He couldn't see. There was nothing left but to take a long rest, treatments and so forth in hopes his sight would come back. I did a lot of research on him, trying to determine which one of the partners had the three millions. It was Whitbeck who in the meantime was in charge. But Whitbeck had no head for business and everything went. Never got a single car off the assembly lines."

"Declared bankruptcy, I understand, 'Where do you come in?'"

"TREASURY department," Cutler said, looking surprised. "Didn't you know? Investigating

Whitbeck's tax returns in connection with his bankruptcy, we stumbled onto something like three million unaccounted for. He'd turned that into cash when he saw the big crash coming, and planted it away somewhere."

Cutler drank more sherry, this time without making a face.

"Well," he went on, "I talked to him, saw right off he was a looney, and thought of you. Knew you could get out of him the whereabouts of the money."

"I got your three notes. But in one, three, two order. That's why I didn't get to the Tavern in time to meet you."

"One of those things," Cutler said cheerfully. "That's when Allison crossed me and Neece's men took over. She had been cooperating with me as a means of recovering at least a part of her inheritance. She was one of the original investors, so to speak, so she stood a good chance of getting some back. But on the night of the Fennenbock's party—seems like a week ago—she overheard her old man phoning this Polack who runs the farm... Whitbeck owns it, did you know? She concluded that's where the money was. Rushed right up there to grab the whole thing."

"And you followed her?" Ferrier said, "And ran into Neece."

"That's it," Cutler said ruefully. "I'd known about the farm, so I went there. She hid until I left to meet you at the Tavern. Then she called Neece to get me off her neck. They jumped me when I left the Tavern when you didn't show. Four of them. I didn't have a chance. Good brawl while it lasted though...."

"What none of us knew," Cutler continued, "was that Jelke was working on it all this time too. Grover was his man; used to be with him before the company failed. Well, as far as I can make out, Jelke was already up at the farm with his Seeing Eye dog. Wonder where they got the brute? They're never discharged from K-9 unless thoroughly broken."

"This one wasn't broken," Ferrier said grimly. "It jumped me!"

Cutler looked startled. "The hell!

So that's where the cut on the forehead comes from! How'd you get away?"

"I drowned it," Ferrier said, "Just luck."

Cutler was staring at him with undisguised admiration and Ferrier realized the futility of trying to explain. It would merely sound like modesty. "Get on with the story," he said impatiently. Vickery hadn't returned from taking Janice home. Ferrier was getting uneasy.

"Well, Grover and Jelke were working on the same idea that this Polack—never can remember his name—knew where the cache was. Probably they had some plan cooked up. Grover would call the farm and say that Whitbeck had sent a man up for it. Man with a dog. Or maybe he was going to hi-jack Allison as soon as she came up with the loot. Something like that."

"She hadn't been able to find it," Ferrier added nervously. Janice might be ready to move on. "And Jelke turned the dog on her."

"Right," Cutler agreed. "She was the only one who knew he was in the scramble, so he eliminated her. Cold-blooded—you ought to study that chap's mind, Steve! Well, they fixed it up like an accident as best they could. Everybody had to lie low, of course, till things quieted down up there. The Polack farmer—Wysorek—was next. That one puzzles me."

"Maybe Jelke thought he could learn the hiding place from him," Ferrier said. "Wysorek probably didn't know where the money was, or anyhow wouldn't tell. So, the dog took care of him."

PETE VICKERY had come into the library. He was alone. He didn't say anything about Janice.

Then Ferrier went on, talking faster now, "they planted another dog there."

"The one I shot," Vickery smiled twistedly. "It was Duncan's dog. I think Grover took it up there to throw everybody off the scent. I recognized it as soon as I saw it. I lost my head—all I could think of was

to shoot it before anybody found out who owned it. Pretty silly, I guess. But I was thinking of the scandal for the Whitbecks."

"All right so far," Cutler said. "Carry on, Stevie."

Cutler shot him a quick look, then a little smile crossed his face. "Our Steve is quite a boy," he said proudly. Ferrier realized he meant it. Daredevil, spectacular person that he was, he still for some obscure reason admired Ferrier. "Drowned the bugger, I understand."

"I should have had Jelke right then," Ferrier said hastily. "That's when I first realized the significance of the murderer using a dog to kill. He was blind; it was his only possible weapon. But I got a knock on the head and I couldn't think when I wanted to. If I had, I could have gotten him anytime last night. A blind man can't go far without his dog. I could have caught him feeling his way back to wherever Grover was waiting."

"He was in a tight spot," Cutler agreed. "He'd lost his weapon. He'd never find another trained dog as vicious as that one, so he made a deal with Neece. Neece was to be his new weapon. Most undeviating mind I ever encountered. Determined to get that three million and start a new empire!"

"You'll find out about that later," Ferrier said. He was getting desperate now. Janice might already be gone.

"Jelke contacted Beverly then, apparently," Ferrier said, "and made a date to meet her on the dock. He was getting desperate. He thought she might know, I guess. He was positive

in case something should happen to Whitbeck had confided in someone, him. What Jelke didn't know was that in Whitbecks condition, he trusted no one."

"He would have killed her next," Pete said in a brooding tone, "when he found out she didn't know. You saved her life, Doctor. I'm personally grateful to you for that."

"They'd have killed the old man if you hadn't worked the old psychologist on Neece."

"Killed me too," Ferrier pointed out realistically. "Does that tie up all the loose ends? I've got to go; if that's everything."

"Seems to be. Except the money. We still have to get that. You'll have to dig it out of his subconscious for us, Stevie. Can do?"

"I should imagine so," Ferrier said. "After he'd had a lot of rest, a few electrical shock treatments ought to bring him back enough for that.... I'll see you about it later, Dick." He stood up.

Pete Vickery said, "Miss Saunders gave me a message for you, Doctor, but I'm afraid I've got it all garbled up. It didn't seem to make sense to me. Something to do with her trailer. She said she never lets any man in there because this is a man's world.. and she wanted a little corner of it all to herself."

"Oh," Ferrier said. He couldn't say any more. He felt hollow, and tired.

"She also said to tell you it was a lousy theory, and would you come as quickly as you could and be a Gypsy... I Don't get it!"

"I do," Ferrier said over his shoulder and went, as quickly as he could.



MEET JOHN DEATH

By H. A. DE ROSSO

John Marsh was a straight guy—it was Francie who turned him into a killer. Would it be the same story again with six years between them—plus a husband and a lover?



Francie crumbled to the ground!

I HADN'T BEEN in Wells for six years. Wells, you see, is my hometown. I was born there and lived the first nineteen years of my life there until the day I killed Roy Clyde over a woman. We were both young enough not to know better and we believed we were crazy in love with her and that's how it was.

Roy Clyde pulled first and he'd

have killed me if I hadn't beat him to it. So they told me to get out of Wells or they'd ride me out on a rail. My father had been a no-good moonshiner and I as a pretty wild kid and everyone figured I'd be good rid-dance. Knowing that they meant business, I left Wells, without even saying goodbye to Francie.

Killing Roy Clyde knocked the

wildness out of me. It was a year before I could really sleep nights. I drifted around, holding different jobs but not for long, until I caught on as a railroad detective for the Chicago, Omaha & Pacific.

This job was to my liking. The company was good to me and I always did my best for them. When the pay car was held up seven miles west of Wells, the railroad sent me there because Wells was my hometown and I knew most of its people.

I had figured that six years had healed the hurt inside me. I was considered a pretty hard-boiled gent and I was confident that sight of he old places and faces wouldn't mean much to me. Anyway, I was sure of that when I left for Wells but as the train began slowing down for the stop and I got up, walking down the swaying aisle of the coach, I wasn't so sure of myself any more.

Perhaps the kind of day it was had something to do with that. The clouds were low and slate-gray in color. The wind blew fitfully in intermittent gusts, cold against my face as I stood on the station platform, looking about me.

Wells was just about the same as the day I'd left it. I couldn't spot any new buildings and the old ones were drier, more faded than before. The same old ruts appeared to run the length of the long, dirt main street and the gusts of wind, sweeping down the street, scooped up little brown dust balls quickly broke up into nothingless.

The train didn't stop long in Wells. It was pulling out almost before I'd taken a good look around. There was a small, thin fellow wearing a black eye-shade and black sleeve-guards down at the end of the platform, loading mail sacks into a small push-cart. This was Lloyd Benteen, who doubled as station agent and telegraph operator at Wells.

THE CART came creaking noisily down the platform and it wasn't until it had almost passed me by that recognition came to Lloyd.

"Why it's John," Lloyd cried,

reaching out a hand. "John Marsh!"

I said, "Hello, Lloyd," taking his hand and a good look at him. His face was very thin with watery blue eyes. He was a couple years older than I and he'd always been a shy, shrinking kid. He, too, had worshipped Francie in his own bashful, distant way and it had come as a shock to me when, checking over the advance information in the company office in Omaha, I had learned that he had married her.

He was saying, "You're looking great, John."

"You look pretty good yourself," I said, and that was a lie. There was worry and fear etched in every one of those lines on his face.

"I hear you're working for the railroad," he said, not sounding very enthusiastic. "A detective..."

"Yeh," I said. "Been with them three years..."

The telegraph sounder inside the depot began to chatter and Lloyd said, "I've got to get to work, John. Nice to have seen you again..."

He ducked into the station and I watched him go, kind of wondering again about all that they had told me back in Omaha. According to them, Lloyd was the best suspect for the man who had lone-handedly held up the pay car. He should have been the only man in Wells who'd had advance information of the whereabouts of the pay car, having got that over the wires.

But knowing Lloyd and his mild ways, I hadn't been quite able to fancy that. Yet I hadn't been able to fancy either a woman like Francie marrying a spineless, half-man like Lloyd Benteen....

I called on Art Clements, the sheriff, first of all. I showed him my papers and then I said, "I want you to deputize me, Art."

He was heavier and meaner-looking than when he'd been tending bar at the Oriental. He said, with a half-sneer, "I don't aim to deputize no killers."

That got into me way down deep where I thought I couldn't be hurt

any more. I closed my wallet and put it back in my pocket. I said, "Whose man are you now, Art? Still Andy Sutro's?"

His face flamed a sickly red. He said, "Look here, Marsh. You ain't gonna talk to me like that."

"Are you afraid you'll catch hell from Andy Sutro if you deputize me, Art?" I asked, needling him. "You've had a week to trace that pay car holdup and you've turned up nothing."

"There's nothing to turn up," Art Clements growled, still red in the face. "No one in Wells knew anything about the pay car except Lloyd Benteen and he has an iron-clad alibi. Some drifter pulled that job."

"All right, Art," I said. "Have it your way. All I want from you is a deputy's badge to give me some legal standing in your county. And you better give it to me, Art. . ."

I pinned the badge to the inside of my coat and then I went outside and took a turn up and down the main drag of Wells. I couldn't quite tell how I felt inside. It was nice to see the old town again but sight of it brought back so many bitter memories.

I was walking along with my head bowed a little, listening to the forlorn clacking of my boot heels on the wooden walk, so that the first awareness I had of her presence was the scent of lilacs.

RAISING MY eyes, I saw her. I guess I just stood there and stared. She was every bit as pretty as I'd remembered her to be. Her eyes were golden brown and her coppery red hair was done up in a bun on the back of her head. There was, too, that little sprinkling of freckles over the bridge of her nose. She had some silly little hat on her head and she was wearing a blue dress that had a lot of lace and frills around her neck and waist. A gust of wind swept down the street, molding her dress to her body, and I felt the old hunger for her beginning in me again.

"Why, John Marsh!" she cried,

lifting a small hand to her throat in surprise. "How are you, John?"

I said, "Hello, Francie. . ."

She held out her hand and I took it, holding it a while, for she made no move to withdraw it, and finally I dropped it.

She had looked me over carefully, her eyes excitedly eager. "It's so good to see you again, John," she said quietly.

"Yes, Francie. It's been quite a long time. . ."

She started along slowly, looking up at me out of the corners of her eyes, and I just kind of fell in step beside her. "What do you think of the old town, John?"

I looked about me again and then I said, "Wells has just got a little older. Looks like Andy Sutro has come up in the world, though. When I—left, Andy owned only the Oriental. Now his name is on about half the places in town. . . And Art Clements is sheriff. . ."

She wasn't looking at me any more. "Yes," she said. "Andy Sutro is a big man in Wells. . ."

She turned down Third Street and I kept slow pace with her, recalling that Third Street was where Lloyd Benteen had lived. Francie was silent for a little ways. Then she asked quietly:

"Are you married, John?"

"No."

"Is there a girl?"

"No."

I could feel her eyes looking up at me again but I just stared down at my boots. She said, "I missed you, John. . ."

I looked at her now. All the old bitterness edging my voice. "But not the way you might think. You were the first girl I'd ever been serious about and the way things were when I had to leave Wells—I haven't quite got over it yet. I've never forgotten you, and what makes it so senseless is that you're not worth my feeling about you the way I do. . . You're no good, Francie."

She had stopped for we were in front of the Benteen home. She looked

up a me with a tight little smile that was almost a sneer.

"Thanks, John," she said. "Thanks for the compliment."

For the first time since I'd stepped off the train a slight smile came to my lips, but there was no humor in it. "They say I'm a bitter man, Francie," I said. "That's why I talk so bitterly..."

SHE LEANED a hand on the gate as if to open it, but she paused and said over her shoulder, "Is it true you're with the railroad, John?"

"Yes," I said. "And everyone in Wells seems to know it, too."

She was smiling a little. "And you're here about that pay car stick-up?"

"Yes."

"And you think Lloyd did it?"

"What I think doesn't matter much. My job is to find out who actually did it, not just find out who I think did it."

Francie laughed quietly. "You're so serious, so bitter, John. You're being so silly about the whole thing. Why, Lloyd was home with me the night of the holdup. He wasn't gone from the house not even for a minute."

"Alibis can be arranged—and broken," I told her. "Don't get me wrong, Francie. Just tell me this. How can Lloyd afford being married to you? A station agent's salary is hardly enough to let you live the way you like to live."

She faced me and I'd never seen so much venom in her eyes. "You'll probably snoop around and find out anyway, so I'll tell you. Lloyd has paid up a lot of bills within the last few days. But the night before—get this, John—the night *before* the pay car was heldup, Lloyd won nine thousand dollars from Andy Sutro in a poker game. Ask Andy, if you don't believe me. He'll tell you..."

"Nine thousand dollars is a lot of money," I said.

"They were playing for high stakes."

"It's very obvious they were," I said dryly.

Her coldness she suddenly put aside. She walked up close to me, so that the scent of lilacs was weakly close, and placed a hand on my sleeve.

"John," she said pleadingly, "why can't you leave Lloyd alone? It's been so hard on him. He worries so much.... Just because *he* married me, don't try to take it out on him. Why are you so suspicious?"

"It's my job to be suspicious. It's my job to suspect everybody."

"Even me, John?"

"Even you, Francie..."

AFTER I left her, I just walked around for a while, seeing her face and nothing else before me. She had invited me inside to stay for lunch but I'd said no. I just couldn't make up my mind about her and the way I felt.

She had always been desirable to me and I guess she still was for Francie was very much a woman and very beautiful and she could put on winning ways. Somehow I'd never got over losing her. Not that I didn't realize I was fortunate, for Francie was the kind of woman who brings no good to a man. I'd never brooded much over her, just sometimes when I was feeling blue and drinking a little too much.

It was just the sight of her again and of all the old faces and places that it left me kind of mixed up inside. all at once I wanted to get my job done as quickly as possible so that I could leave Wells again...

It was around two o'clock in the afternoon and I hadn't eaten since breakfast on the train. There was a little eating place beside Kelly's barber shop that I couldn't remember having been there and I went inside.

The place was empty. I sat down at the counter and the waitress came over and I ordered roast beef and potatoes. I watched her as she walked into the kitchen, trying to place her in my memory.

She was rather tall and slim with long, slender, work-reddened fingers. I'd noticed those first of all and then I'd looked up and seen her thin face

that to me seemed quite pretty. Maybe it was her large, brown eyes or the faint rose of her lips or the thought that her smile must be a flashing, beautiful thing.

When she brought my order, I had finally placed her. I said, "You're Mary Benteen, aren't you? Lloyd's sister?"

She nodded.

For the first time that day I really felt like smiling. "You were just a skinny-legged kid in pig-tails the last time I saw you," I said. "Maybe you remember me? I'm John Marsh..."

She stood there, staring at me, winding the edge of her apron around her fingers. All at once she burst out: "Mr. Marsh, why don't you leave Lloyd alone?"

"Why should you say that? I haven't done anything to Lloyd. I just said hello to him when I got off the train."

Her face was pale and tight. "Talk is going around that you're here to arrest Lloyd for that pay car hold-up and—and Lloyd didn't do it."

"Look, Mary," I said. "I'm here on that pay car hold-up, yes. But I'm here to dig up facts and act on the findings. If Lloyd is involved, then I'll have to take him in. That's my job."

She seemed frightened, her voice quivering a little, as if she didn't quite dare say what she was saying. "They—they're also saying you're going to pin everything on Lloyd because—" her chin lifted defiantly—"because he married Francie!"

I laughed bitterly. "Good old Wells," I said. "The same old gossip place." I looked at Mary and I guess my face was cold and hard for she seemed to shrink back a step. "Francie was my girl years ago. I killed a man over her. But I've never regretted losing her. In fact, I feel sorry for Lloyd, being married to her. She can't bring good to any man."

SHE WAS standing there so frightened and worried that I felt sorry for her. So I said, "Lloyd seems to have an alibi for the night

of the stick-up. Francie says he was home with her all night. Is that right?"

Her eyes lowered suddenly and she mumbled, "I don't know I don't live with Lloyd any more. Not since he got married."

"Oh," I said. "Francie?"

She nodded, not raising her eyes. "I couldn't stand it. Him being so blind to everything except what Francie tells him. He'd do anything she asked, not even stopping to think if it was good or bad. I just couldn't stand it any more."

I'd eaten all I cared to so I paid up and then walked to the door. There I stopped, looking back, and I thought I saw tears in Mary's eyes but I wasn't sure.

I searched for the right words to say but they just couldn't be found. So I said, "I wish I could tell you that everything is going to be all right... This—this is a hell of a job, Mary..."

I took a room at the hotel and slept the rest of the afternoon for that had been an overnight train ride and I could never sleep on them. Night had come when I went out again. There were no stars or moon, just the black of the clouds all above, and the wind whistling down the main drag of Wells was colder than ever.

I walked down the street, my coat buttoned high around my neck, but shivering nevertheless. Andy Sutro's Oriental was lighted and noisy and I struck for there. In six years the type of the crowd hadn't changed one bit. A few booted and spurred cowboys and ranchers. Hard-rock miners with the mark of their calling etched indelibly in the creases of their hands. A number of townsmen.

I couldn't help thinking as I strode to the bar that it had been in the dim shadows at the rear of the Oriental hat I'd shot down Roy Clyde of an afternoon....

My presence evoked a few nods of greeting and remembrance but I didn't care to follow them up. I ordered bourbon and drank alone. But it

wasn't long before Andy Sutro came to me.

ANDY WAS about as tall as I and of about the same build, though he was starting to show signs of a paunch. He was about fifteen years older than me and he was dark with a well-trimmed black mustache and teeth that flashed whitely when he smiled, like he was smiling now.

"Why, John," he cried, holding out his hand, "John Marsh! It's good to see you again!"

I took his hand without much enthusiasm. He beckoned to the bartender to fill my glass again and took a drink himself.

"I was beginning to think I'd never see you again, John."

I glanced at the back of the barroom and then quickly down to my shot glass. "Yes," I said. "I never expected to come back."

"You never know when or where duty calls," Andy said, laughing and raising his drink.

I drank with him and then Andy lowered his voice to a confidential pitch. "Talk is you're here about that pay car hold-up, John. Let me give you a tip. Don't be fooled by all those rumors about Lloyd. He won a lot of money from me the night before the holdup. I hated to lose, of course, but still I was glad for Lloyd. He's been having a hard time of it." Andy looked at me and shrugged. "You know Francie's tastes..."

I said, "Why is everyone so sure of Lloyd's innocence?"

"The facts, John. Lloyd just didn't do it so you can't prove it. I agree with Art Clements that some drifter, passing through, spotted the pay car, held it up, and skipped the country. That's your man, John."

I said, "Well, Andy, I've got to be going."

"Have another drink," Andy invited.

"No. I've got to go to work."

Andy's brows lifted. "Work?"

"Yes, work," I said, smiling a little dryly. "I don't sit around on my rump the way Art Clements does. I'm a getter, I am, Andy..."

I waited around in my hotel room until Wells was all dark and quiet and then I went out. I'd thought the whole thing over, trying to piece it all together, and, while there were still some parts that didn't quite fit, I was beginning to see how it was and I didn't like it one little bit.

In my job there are times when certain measures have to be taken and I was taking one now. I went down the deserted main street, cutting into an alley until I came to the rear of Andy Sutro's Oriental. I pried open the rear window of his office and crawled through.

Inside I paused a moment, trying to press into my mind something that I couldn't quite catch. Then I went to work. I went over Andy's desk carefully, sounding it here and there, until I discovered the false bottom and inside this hidden drawer was a strong box.

My fourth key worked and the box was open. By match light I examined its contents and quickly found the part that made the puzzle fit together perfectly.

I took what I wanted and, replacing the strong box, was ready to leave when I heard the door open. I whirled, whipping my sixshooter out from under my left arm. Andy Sutro was standing in the doorway. He had a gun in his hand, but I had him covered, so that he just hung on to his weapon without bringing it to level. Reaching out, I took his sixshooter.

"John," Andy said, "this is illegal entry. You may have a deputy's badge but I can make trouble for you."

"I don't think you will, though," I told him.

"What were you looking for?"

"You'll find out after I'm done."

"What's this all about, John? Are you trying to run a frame on me?"

I smiled tightly at him. "I'm just giving you enough rope to hang yourself with, Andy..."

I started backing toward the window. "Don't try anything foolish, Andy," I warned him. "I'll leave your gun outside the window. Just you take it easy."

He didn't say anything, just stood there watching me. I backed through the window and dropped to the ground. And it wasn't until I was back in the good, clean, cold air of Main street that the thing about Andy's office that had puzzled me became abruptly clear. The faint, almost undetectable, odor of lilacs...

The thought came to me, driving through the heaviness of my sleep, that I wasn't alone in my room. Perhaps because peril is a constant part of my job I'd acquire this strange warning sense. All at once my eyes were opened, all the drowsiness driven instantly out of me, and I saw the shadow of a man crouched over me with uplifted arm.

That shadowy hand flashed down but I was reaching for it, closing my fingers about the wrist, twisting my body out of the way of the slashing knife. I could feel the blade slice through the bed blankets into the straw mattress.

My rolling carried my assailant with me, both of us crashing to the floor. He wasn't very big or very strong and, bending his knife-arm way behind his back, I could hear the crying moan escaping through his clenched teeth. I twisted harder and the knife fell to the floor with a dull plop.

I had both of his hands clasped behind his back now and I pushed him over to the window and in the faint light filtering through I recognized him. It was Lloyd Benteen.

A MAD ANGER was running through me. I'd hated this job from the moment it had been assigned to me and all that dislike and bitterness has been building up inside me and now it came bursting out.

Shoving Lloyd hard against the wall, I asked savagely, "Who put you up to this, Lloyd? It was Andy, wasn't it? Andy Sutro?"

He was shaking with fear and reaction and his breath came whistling out of his throat in shivering sobs. "Francie," he mumbled. "Francie..."

"Francie. Andy. It's all the same,"

I said angrily. "They're all in this with you."

"Francie said you'd been bothering her. That you were going to turn me in for that pay car holdup and then take her away from me. She said you told her that. Bragged about it. She was your girl, you said, and no one else was going to have her..."

"You poor, damn fool," I said. "You'd believe anything Francie tells you."

"It's true," he insisted shakingly. "You hate me. You'd like to get even with me for marrying Francie."

"I'll tell you how much Francie means to me," I said through my teeth. "I know you held up that pay car and that Francie and Andy Sutro put you up to it. You'd lost money gambling to Andy Sutro. Francie had run up bills in every store in town. Your creditors wanted to be paid off. So Francie and Andy put it up to you. Hold up that pay car and Andy would fix you up with an alibi by saying you'd won the money from him the night before playing poker."

"Own up to it, Lloyd, and I'll show you how much Francie means to me. I'll run her in along with you and Andy. I'm not bothering her—but someone else is. While you're working nights down at the station, she's seeing Andy Sutro."

"That's not true. Andy's a good friend. Of both of us."

"Have it your way. But tonight I broke into Andy's office. Francie wasn't there but I smelled her perfume. She'd been there."

Lloyd just shook his head. "No, no," he moaned.

"I feel sorry for you, Lloyd," I said earnestly. "You're so crazy in love with Francie that you're blind to the cheap hussy she really is. Own up, Lloyd, and I'll put in a good word for you. Nobody was hurt in the holdup and I can get you off easy. What do you say?"

"It's a trick. I don't trust you..."

"All right," I said hotly. "I'll do it without your help. When I was going through Andy Sutro's strong box I picked up a couple of crisp, new twenty dollar bills that had been

in that pay car. I'm going down to the station with you right now and I want you to wire the serial number of those bills to Omaha. That will be all the evidence I'll need against you and Francie and Andy Sutro..."

Before leaving Omaha I had worked out a code with the office because of the possibility of having to transmit messages through Lloyd Benteen, the operator. There really wasn't any record of the serial numbers of the currency in that pay car but my wire was so worded that the office in Omaha would confirm the numbers. And Lloyd, of course, inform Francie and Andy Sutro.

I was hoping to get Lloyd to break down and confess for he was the weak one but the only way I could see that was to shake his faith in Francie. The way I had it figured out Francie was ready to ditch Lloyd for Andy. Francie and Andy would pull out together, leaving Lloyd to face the rap and if I could time things so that Lloyd could see Francie running out on him, I was sure Lloyd would talk.

It was drawing things pretty fine but that was a chance I had to take..

The answer to my wire came that evening. It was in code, of course. I looked at it and then at Lloyd, who was watching me with a white, strained expression on his face.

I said quietly, "You'd better come with me, Lloyd."

He glanced at the telegraph key and sounder and I added, "We'll stop at Charlie Day's and tell him to take over."

Lloyd didn't say anything. He put on his coat quietly and went out the door ahead of me. There was a dead, beaten light in his eyes and I had the impression that he'd become resigned to it all.

I took him to Third Street and then we cut behind several houses until we'd come to the woodshed behind Lloyd's home. Lloyd showed his first interest then.

"What's the idea, John?" he asked.

"I just want to show you something," I said, "I want to show you

that I know Francie better than you."

He remained silent after that. The light was on in the house and we could see Francie moving about. After a while the light was doused and we just waited.

IT WAS AROUND midnight that the clop-clop of two horses moving down Third Street came to our ears. I nudged Lloyd. The horses stopped in front of the Benteen home. Beckoning Lloyd, I edged along the shadows close to the house. Behind me Lloyd's breathing was almost a sob.

The front door opened and shut and Francie's light steps clicked across the verandah. We had reached the corner of the house so that we could see. Andy Sutro had brought the horses and he had run to meet Francie, taking her two traveling bags.

"I told you to travel light," Andy grumbled.

"I had to have some clothes along," Francie pouted.

Behind me, Lloyd was crying now. I'd never heard a man cry before and the experience left me kind of sick inside. He was crying as though his heart was all busted up into little bits and was pouring out of his throat.

"I loved her," Lloyd said through his sobs. "I'd have done anything for her. I stole for her. I'd have committed murder for her. I believed in her out she's nothing but a dirty bitch... Francie... Francie..."

That was enough for me. Andy and Francie were at the gate now and, reaching under my arm for my six-shooter, I stepped clear of the house.

I was all set to call out with my gun in hand when the shot came from behind me. The bullet whined past me and I dropped instinctively to the ground, cursing myself for not having searched Lloyd instead of presuming that he was unarmed.

Francie screamed but the sound was cut off sharply. From my position on the ground, I saw her crumble. Andy had dropped her bags. His gun was out in a flash and roaring. I heard Lloyd moan and give a couple of

choking coughs and then the dull plop as he fell.

"Andy!" I shouted, levelling my gun. "Hold it!"

But his gun didn't pause a moment. From Lloyd it turned on me, the bullets kicking up turf beside me. Andy made a good target, standing straight and tall against the starlight, and I fired twice...

I looked them over and they were all dead. People had gathered by now, talking in hushed, excited whispers, and Art Clements came puffing up.

"I'll give you a report in the morning," I told him, and then started down Third Street, anxious to be away from there. But I stopped because Mary Benteen passed me running and so I turned back. She cried a while over Lloyd with some women trying to comfort her.

She noticed me then and came over beside me. I could feel her eyes questioning me. I said dully, "Lloyd shot

Francie and Andy shot Lloyd. I got Andy..."

She said, "This afternoon Lloyd came to see me. He figured that everything was up and he told me the whole thing. How Francie and Andy Sutro talked him into holding up a pay car to pay off his debts. He asked me not to tell anything until—until something happened. And he said that no matter what happened, not to hold anything against you. Lloyd told me how you'd warned him about Francie and he was just waiting to find out for sure before coming to you and giving himself up. He said you were all right, John..."

It came to me that I liked the way "John" sounded when she said it. I looked down at her, at her plain, saddened face and all at once I was immensely glad that I had come back to Wells after all. I knew that neither one of us would smile for a little while yet but there would be time enough for that in the future.

I said, "I'll take you home, Mary..."



THE BLUE CLUE

By NORMAN A. DANIELS

There was magic in Benny the Dip's fingers. There must have been, for even in death, they hung a noose around a killer's neck!



There Were Four Quick Shots!

SERGEANT Logan of Headquarters Squad invariably stopped at wizened-faced, stoop-shouldered Benny's newstand for his evening paper. There was a friendly reason for that—and a professional

one. Logan had once put Benny away, as a light fingered dip of no great intelligence, but with fingers like magic. Benny served his time in prison and came out even more stupid than when he went in. He also emerged

with an intense hatred for those he called 'bad men'. Logan considered it part of his job to keep him out of trouble.

Benny, his bent, peaked cap pulled low, saw Logan coming two blocks away and he was neatly folding his usual paper when Logan stopped. Benny grinned and almost looked human.

"Hello Sergeant. I been waitin' for you."

Logan glanced at the headlines and then stuffed the paper into his pocket. "Okay, Benny," he said. "How's it going?"

"Listen Sergeant," Benny looked around keenly for a moment before he spoke. "You been awful good to me, ain'tcha? There's them says I should hate you because you sent me to jail once, remember? But I don't because after I got out, I was bad again. I picked a man's pocket, didn't I? And you didn't pinch me, did you? 'Steard, you bought me a nice newsstand and I went into business. I been wantin' to do somethin' good fer you too and today I can."

"Forget it, Benny," Logan said, expecting the usual carefully wrapped bunch of wilted violets that Benny might have purchased from someone as unfortunate as himself. Benny loved flowers and figured everyone else did too.

"No—I won't forget it," he said seriously. Then he reached beneath his little stand and handed Logan a thickly wadded, sealed brown envelope. "You take this, Sergeant. There's a lot o' money in it and it's all yours. Benny ain't a guy to forget favors—and you been good to me."

Logan shoved the envelope into his coat pocket beside the newspaper. He thanked Benny gravely, shook hands with him and resumed his journey home.

He lived in a neat little apartment just off the busier streets. Logan let himself in, took off his coat and vest and lit a cigar. He propped his feet on an ottoman, yanked the newspaper out of the pocket of his coat that hung on a nearby chair and the enve-

lope which Benny had given him, fell out.

"Now I wonder what he's got me this time," Logan smiled. "Poor Benny—he means well."

Logan broke the seal with his thumb. He extracted the contents and then he blinked twice. Sergeant Logan held fifty thousand dollars in five hundred dollar bills in his hand.

LOGAN GRABBED his coat, pulled it on as he sped toward the door and scooped up his hat on the way. He didn't wait for the elevator, but ran down the four flights of stairs instead. He yelled to a taxi driver, showed his badge and ordered him to turn around and go back even though this was a one way street. Logan flipped a bill to the driver as he slowed up. He jumped out of the taxi and raced toward Benny's newsstand. With a sigh of relief he noticed that the little news dealer was still there.

"Benny," Logan panted, "where did you get that dough? Who gave it to you?"

Benny was all smiles. "You liked it, didn't you? Gosh, I was afraid you wouldn't get here before the bad men came back and I wanted to give it to you because you're not a bad man. You're a good man. You been good to. . ."

There were four quick shots and Benny's sentence was cut off. He flopped across the counter of his newsstand and his blood began to mingle with the black newstype. A car was pulling into traffic as Logan glanced up.

He yelled to a harness bull, gave him orders to stand by Benny and do anything he could. Then Logan ran into the middle of the street and jumped on the running board of a cab.

"This is the law. Catch that maroon sedan cutting fancy steps two blocks north. Never mind speed or lights. Catch it."

The taxi jerked forward as the driver sent his gas pedal to the floor. He snaked between traffic, using his horn constantly. He sailed by stop

lights, cut in front of buses and gave that crate every ounce of soup she possessed. Still they didn't gain on the car that was streaking toward the outskirts.

As soon as the traffic thinned, Logan drew his gun, held onto the cab door with one hand and leveled the pistol. He got the rear window of the sedan in his sights and blasted away twice. The rear window cracked into a million pieces and the sedan began swerving crazily. But the driver steadied her a moment later and the chase was on again. Logan fired two more shots, aimed at the gas tank, but he missed both of them for they were tearing over a rough road and the jarring made good marksmanship impossible.

Then flashes of flame came from both rear windows of the murder car. The taxi wobbled now for some of the slugs smashed through her radiator and hood. Logan fired his last two cartridges and groaned, for he missed each time. The killers were shooting back and they seemed to aim directly between the taxi's headlights.

Logan slid into the rear of the cab and began reloading frantically. The driver spoke without turning his head.

"Can't keep her rolling much longer, boss. They put plenty of holes in my radiator and the water's about gone. I'll burn a bearing in a minute."

As if to confirm his story, the motor began smoking. At the same time Logan realized that they were losing speed. He ordered the driver to stop, pushed open the door, jumped out and stepped into the middle of the highway. He levelled his pistol and blazed away until it was empty. The receding tail light of the murder seemed to taunt him. He walked back to the cab.

"Can you reach town without burning this crate up?" he asked. "And don't worry about the repair bill. That'll be taken care of."

LOGAN FIDGETED on the long drive back. Of course Benny was dead. Poor, half witted Benny

who hated 'bad men' and now he had died under the guns of that very type. Logan transferred to another taxi when they reached the city limits. Fifteen minutes later he watched an ambulance surgeon give the orders for a morgue wagon. Benny had died instantly. Logan crammed his bulky form into the newsstand, knelt beside the dead man and rapidly searched him. He found several pieces of string, for Benny was a string saver. Half a sandwich, apparently a hold over from lunch, occupied another pocket. The trousers contained a few small bills and some change and—a blue poker chip which interested Logan. He examined it more closely in the ray of his flashlight. It seemed to have been broken several times and pasted together neatly. Benny might have owned it for years, but Benny surely had never been in the blue chips financially. Logan stuffed the chip into his vest pocket.

"What are those bruises on his neck and face?" he asked the ambulance surgeon.

The doctor shrugged. "Looks as though someone slugged him—tossed him around a bit. They were made before his death."

Logan nodded and stood aside when the morgue wagon rolled up. He watched them carry Benny's corpse away and Logan felt a genuine sadness at the loss. There were many men smarter than Benny—and worse in character too.

Logan began to realize that he was fifty thousand dollars richer. He fingered the envelope in his coat pocket. Then his eyes narrowed a trifle. He walked into a drug store, called headquarters and made a tentative report. Next he did some real work, checking the names and telephone numbers of various bank cashiers. He spent two eighty of his own money before he got results. Logan asked each man one question.

"Did anyone draw fifty thousand dollars in five hundred dollar bills during the last day or two?"

The cashier of the Security Trust Company had the right answer. "Why yes. Fifty thousand is a lot of money

for one withdrawal and in five hundred dollar bills—well, it made the deal outstanding. The man who drew the cash could afford it, but still I thought the transaction odd. His name is Guy Newcombe. He's a retired manufacturer and he lives somewhere on Grove Boulevard."

Logan hung up. He started out of the drug store, but on a hunch walked up to the post office substation window maintained there, bought a big envelope and tucked the money into it. He addressed this to himself at Police Headquarters, registered it and even mailed the registration slip to himself in another envelope. Benny had been murdered because of that money. Logan didn't want to be carrying around any sum like that—nor any indication that he ever had received it.

HE TAXIED to the home of Guy Newcombe, rang the bell and the door opened to reveal the scowling face of a butler who looked as though he'd be more at home in a prize ring. Logan showed his badge.

"Sorry—the boss ain't home." The butler started to close the door. Logan simply shoved out his hand, laid the heel of it against the butler's chin and pushed him backward. Then he walked sedately along the reception hall and turned into a room where he saw an elderly man nervously pacing the floor.

"I'm a detective, Mr. Newcombe," he announced. "Did you get your fifty thousand dollars worth tonight? Or are they holding out on you?"

Newcombe turned deathly pale. For a full minute he was unable to speak and when he did, his voice was hoarse with poorly suppressed excitement.

"I—I don't know what you mean. I—"

Someone moved close behind Logan. It was the butler and his scowl was blacker than ever.

"You want I should bust this guy's jaw, boss? It'll be a pleasure."

Logan turned around very calmly and snickered in contempt. The big man gave a howl of wrath, started a long, looping right and Logan

ducked. The blow whistled through the air. Logan's head bobbed up directly in front of the astounded butler's nose. A fist arose from apparently nowhere. The butler straightened up like a ramrod and then he wilted. Logan grabbed him and threw him on a davenport. Then he dusted his hands.

"Your selection of servants is lousy," he grunted to Newcombe. "Now let's get down to business. You drew fifty grand out of the bank today. You put it in a brown envelope, sealed it and gave it to a go-between. Somebody has something worth fifty grand to you. What is it and who has it? There's no use stalling, Mr. Newcombe. You're an important man and I'm about as big as a peanut compared to you—influentially I mean. But—I'll haul you downtown in two minutes unless you talk."

Newcombe sat down heavily. "Yes—yes, you're right, officer. I—I should have called the police before. But I—I had nothing to go on. My son Paul has been missing for two days. This morning I received a phone call from him. He told me he had to have fifty thousand in five hundred dollar bills. That his life depended upon it. He also told me not to get new bills or ones numbered consecutively. He implied that he'd go on being missing for several more days until certain parties found out whether or not I'd reported this matter to the police or tried to trick them with marked money. I—I obeyed, naturally. I can afford fifty thousand dollars and my son is worth a dozen times that much to me. I gave the money to a thin newsboy—man, I suppose would be the better word for him. He'll know who collected the money. His stand is—"

"Don't bother telling me," Logan said. "The man you gave that money to is dead. He was murdered, and what makes matters worse—the killers probably figured you were in on the double cross that newsman apparently pulled. I—"

"Look out!" Newcombe yelled.

Logan just let his knees go rubbery and went into a deep crouch. That

act saved his life for a bullet ripped through the air just where his chest had been. The butler was still seated on the davenport, but he held a smoking gun in his hand. His wits were still a trifle paralyzed by Logan's punch and that probably helped to save Logan's life also. The detective's right hand streaked toward his hip pocket and came back again, shooting. The butler threw up both hands, doubled over and slid to the floor like a gymnast trying to do a barrel roll.

Logan jumped over beside him. He straightened up and looked at Newcombe and slid his gun back into its holster.

"You need a new butler. And where did you pick up this mug?"

"Paul brought him home just a day or two before he disappeared." Newcombe seemed a little nervous. "I-I simply kept him on even though I knew he wasn't exactly the type."

"The type?" Logan grunted. "I didn't recognize him at first, but now I do. That was a killer and all around no good heel with the gentle name of Cookie—one of Spanish Cavas' hoodlums. Which brings to mind—did your son ever hang around gambling joints? Did he ever come to you for big money—saying it was urgent?"

NEWCOMBE LOOKED startled this time. "Why—yes. Only a week ago he asked me for two thousand dollars and the week before he needed five hundred. I don't believe in spoiling a boy but he was so—so damnably scared of something."

Logan nodded. "He had reason to be. As I see it, the set-up was this. Your son played Spanish Cavas' games and lost—as all suckers do. They made him come to you for the dough and so long as they got it, everything was under control. But the kid maybe lost a small fortune one night and knew you'd never come through with that amount. He told Cavas so. Then Cavas sent this pal of his to act as butler and keep an eye on the boy at the same time. Cavas usually goes to all lengths to insure his winnings. The showdown came

the night your son disappeared. Cavas has him—a clear snatch if I ever saw one and—Cavas' last deal off the bottom of the deck."

Logan phoned headquarters, made his report and waited until a radio car arrived to take over. He walked to the corner, caught a bus and went to the other side of town. He was alone in the back of the bus and unobserved, so he reloaded his gun. Logan had an idea he might need it.

Cavas ran a so-called night club on a barge anchored off a pier in the North River. The lower deck really was a night club replete with orchestra, dance floor and all the fixings, but Cavas made most of his money in gambling rooms fitted into the hold. His personal quarters were on the upper deck.

A stolid looking mug dressed in a sailor's uniform gave Logan a snappy salute, recognized him and growled an oath. Logan stepped onto the gangplank.

"Go ahead and push that warning buzzer," he snapped. "If I cared, you'd be flat on your back right now. This isn't an axe party. All I want to do is talk to Cavas."

Apparently the outside guard could send signals in code about everyone who entered because Logan expected that he'd be stopped every half a dozen steps while he was, instead, actually flagged right ahead until he reached Spanish Cavas' private offices. Even there the door opened and Cavas arose from his desk and stuck out a chubby, brown hand.

"Logan—a pleasure. What brings you here?"

Logan sat down on the arm of a chair. "Cut the clowning, Spanish. I'm here about a kid named Peter Newcombe. And maybe a snatch case which wouldn't look well for you."

"So you finally caught up with him." Cavas shook his head sadly. "He has given me more trouble than a hive of bees. Logan—you tell me what you want him for, eh? And that crack about a snatch case. You know me better than that, Logan."

Logan shoved his hat to the back of his head and eyed the gambler intently. Cavas was speaking the truth. No

one had ever gotten anything on him except the fact that he ran gambling games.

"Newcombe's father," Logan explained, "was hijacked for fifty grand. The dough was given to a go-between who was killed before he could tell who the money was meant for. The Newcombe boy personally phoned his father . . ."

"Wait a minute," Cavas interrupted. "I know the kid phoned his old man. How? Because I was standing right outside the booth when he did the talking. Look, Sarge, I don't want any trouble with the cops. I was trying to do the kid a favor, but somebody must have horned in. Somebody close enough to me to know the real truth. I'm not saying a word, understand! You get your dope direct from the kid himself. It's a dirty trick on him, but when it means a trip to a death cell—I don't want any part of it. Just tag along after me, Sarge."

Cavas signalled one of his men to remain in the office. Then he led Logan along a dark, narrow passageway, down two flights of steps and into the hole. Very faintly, Logan could hear the murmur of the gamblers in the rooms separated from him by only thin walls. Cavas stepped in front of a closed door and tapped on the panels.

"Notice," he told Logan, "the door is locked from inside. I'm not holding the kid. He's locked himself in."

THE DOOR opened and revealed a boy of about nineteen, his skin the color of a convict just released from six months in the hole, and his eyes haunted with terror.

Cavas tried to soothe him. "Listen, kid, I done my best for you. Now I can't do any more. The dough you asked your father to send was hijacked someplace and he thinks you've been snatchd. So does Sergeant Logan here—"

"Sergeant?" the boy cried. "You mean he's the—the police?"

"That's right," Logan stepped into the room. "We'll have a little talk. Just tell me everything that happened. If I can help you, I will."

Young Newcombe looked hopelessly at Cavas and then back at Logan. Finally he shivered and sat down, wrapping his arms about him as if he were cold, yet the temperature in this ship's hold was almost stifling.

"I—guess I'd better. If Cavas brought you here, it must be all right. It's all my fault, honest, Sergeant. I played Cavas' games and I lost—plenty. Dad made it up a couple of times but I tried to win it back and—I was nicked for eight thousand dollars. Cavas said I could take my time about paying, but—I had to pay."

"Sure," Cavas interrupted. "Guys who gamble ought to have the dough or else they're gambling with my money against me. That's worse than running a crooked wheel. Keep talking, kid."

"Well—I couldn't ask Dad for the money. I had a couple of hundred left and I went to another place—a stud poker game. I figured I could get enough to pay Cavas. I won for about two hours and then I began losing. I signed notes, phony checks, anything they put in front of me. Then I—I saw one of the men cheating. There was an argument. I hit him and he—he fell out of the window, six stories above the ground. He was—dead when they reached him. So I ran out on them and came here. Where else could I go? I told Cavas the truth and he let me go out and phone Dad. I asked for plenty of money—made it sound as though I'd been kidnapped, because I wanted enough to leave the country on. I asked him to leave it at a newstand where I'd pick it up later. That's—all there is to it."

"Hm," Logan grunted. "Sounds like a murder rap all right except that there had been no report of a kill. Maybe they hid the body. Now who put a flea in your ear about calling your father and asking for fifty grand? You didn't think of that yourself cause it would take a guy with a moderate amount of brains to do that."

"It—it was—Fresnay, one of Spanish Cavas' men., He—he also suggested the place where the money was to be left."

"The rat," Cavas growled. "Listen, copper, to the rest of the lowdown. What the kid told you is on the level. This guy Fresnay—I threw him out on his ear yesterday. He was sent here by Joe Moore. That bird has been trying to squash my racket for months, so his own would get all the gravy. Moore can't make dough unless he plays a crooked game. Mine are on the up-and-up. So Fresnay advises the kid, then tips off Moore to collect the dough and leave me holding the bag. I'm telling you, Sarge, if you don't drag Moore in so help me, I'll bust his joint wide open if I go to jail for it. Now take this kid out of here. I don't want no trouble with the cops because it'll mean a finish of my business and I got too much invested in this old scow. I was crazy to try helping the kid in the first place."

LOGAN arose and walked over to the boy. He took his arm in a firm grasp. "Let's go, kid. We'll dig up the rats who fleeced you and make 'em talk. If you're telling the truth, no jury will pin a first degree murder rap on you."

"Cavas touched Logan's shoulder as he escorted the boy out. "There won't be any trouble, eh Sarge? I was only trying to help the kid."

Logan grinned. "Sure, Spanish. But hiding a murderer isn't exactly according to Hoyle the way the law makers set things up. I'll take your word on not running out."

Logan piloted his prisoner along the narrow corridors and down the gangplank. He looked around for some kind of a conveyance.

"Logan," someone called and he looked in that direction. A squad car, with Tom Brophy, a department chauffeur at the wheel, stood with its nose pointed toward the highway.

"I heard you were inside and waited to give you a lift," Brophy went on.

Logan towed his prisoner toward

the car. Brophy reached out and opened the door. Logan stepped close to the car and his face grew flushed. There were two guns menacing him from the darkness of the tonneau. A soft voice ordered him to thrust his prisoner inside and get in himself. Logan obeyed because there wasn't anything else he could do.

"Honest, Sarge," Brophy apologised, "they made me do it. They stopped my bus and put a gun against my back."

"Shut up," one of the thugs rasped, "or I'll put the same gun against your thick head and pull the trigger. Drive out of here and do it very careful. Head straight north—for the outskirts."

Logan gave his shivering prisoner a wry glance and then looked at his captors. He nodded in recognition.

"Hello, Fresnay—and you, Ramon. How are all of Joe Moore's gambling games going?"

Young Newcombe strained forward. A gun butt crashed down on his skull and he rolled forward until he was propped up between the back and the front seats. Fresnay turned his gun around and prodded it into Logan's middle.

"That kid is nothing but trouble, trouble. Everybody he meets gets into trouble—including you, Logan. So far we been able to wiggle out of the mess he makes, but not you. That nose on your pan is too long, see? Also Spanish gets his later on. Nothing personal, y'understand. Just orders."

"Oh sure," Logan said tightly. "If you gun me out, it'll be Joe Moore who pulls the trigger. I suppose Joe Moore also gunned out that poor newspaper guy—by proxy. Wait until you tell that story to a jury."

Fresnay's lips parted in a scornful smile. "No jury will ever see us, copper. When they find you, it'll look just like you were taking a killer to headquarters, but you had an accident on the way. Maybe your prisoner got gay and you lost control of the bus, see? Because when they find you, it'll take a smart guy to put the pieces together. If it makes you feel any worse, here's what will happen. We

get out pretty soon. We tie your wrists with some rough cord soaked in gasoline. It'll burn away without leaving a trace. You'll be at the wheel, your prisonr cuffed beside you. In the back seat will be a nice little bomb which goes pop and throws a lot of burning stuff all over the place. That'll burn up too."

Logan glanced up into the the rear view window. Brophy, behind the wheel, had a set expression around his mouth. Suddenly he yanked the wheel savagely. At the same instant, Fresnoy arose and smashed Brophy across the head with his gun. His teammate acted in unison, leaned over the seat and grabbed the wheel. He righted the car. Logan had no chance to attack. Wedged into the corner with the unconscious Paul Newcombe barring his way, the detective sergeant was helpless. Fresnoy sat back within two seconds of the time when he had gone into action. His gun covered Logan.

"Let the bus slow down," Fresnoy ordered Ramon. "Then climb into the front seat. Throw that damned driver out and put some lead into him."

Ramon clambered into the front seat, opened the door and pushed Brophy out. Then he slid behind the wheel, leaned out of the car and aimed his gun. He fired twice and then stepped on the gas. Logan began to have a very hollow feeling around the pit of his stomach. These two killers weren't fooling.

THE CAR continued on for about a mile and a half, laboring up a steep incline. At the top, Ramon turned the sedan around, headed her straight down the steep hill and set the brake. He got out, opened the back door and motioned Logan to step out. Ramon's gun was buried in Logan's middle while Fresnoy busied himself by soaking some heavy cord in a small can of gasoline. Then he lashed Logan's wrists behind his back. Finally he sprinkled what was left of the gasoline around the front seat, threw the can into the bushes and wiped his hands.

"Okay," he said. "Get behind the

wheel, copper. Ramon, take his cuffs off and put one of 'em on his right wrist and the other around Newcombe's left wrists. Dont touch anything else—not even the copper's gun. Things have got to look very natural."

They pushed Logan behind the wheel. Ramon ran around the car, dragged Newcombe out and threw him in beside Logan. He attached the handcuffs, closed the door and joined Fresnoy. The killer carefully lifted a small square parcel from the tonneau floor. There was a wooden pin on one side of it. He pulled this out and then set the box in the middle of the back seat.

"You're bound to crash," he told Logan gayly. "When that happens, the stuff in that box mixes and—blooey."

Fresnoy released the brake, slammed the front door and he and Ramon hurried to the back of the car, gave it a tremendous shove and the sedan began rolling down the incline slowly. It gained speed with every turn of the wheel and Logan didn't waste a second. He pushed away from the door, intending to open it with his elbows, his teeth, anything. But the door latch was missing. Fresnoy thought of everything. The scenery was beginning to whiz by at a rapid speed now. Logan hunched himself from under the wheel, got his feet on the seat and stood up as high as he could. Newcombe's cuffed wrist impeded him as much as the gasoline soaked ropes around his wrists. There was savage determination in every move that he made, for the stakes were high now. Logan knew what that little package in the seat could do. He'd served on the Arson Squad for a couple of years. Some flimsy wall separated two chemicals. The slightest jar would break that wall, allow the chemicals to mix and the reaction would result in an explosion that would throw flame in every direction.

He literally hurled himself over the edge of the front seat and landed in back, pulling Newcombe's still very silent form half over the seat. He glanced out of the window. They

were halfway down the incline and doing about fifty. Even if his plan worked, nothing short of a miracle could save him. But anything was better than being burned to a crisp.

There was a blanket hanging from the rack. He had noticed it when he first got into the car. Logan leaned forward, closed his teeth around the blanket and dragged it on the explosive package, used his head to tuck it closely around the infernal machine. Then he pulled Newcombe completely over and into the tonneau. He wedged his form into a corner, draped himself on top of it and waited. There was absolutely nothing else he could do.

THE CAR rocked dangerously and the tires hummed across the smooth concrete. They'd leave the road at any second, for unguided, the car would be unable to maintain a straight course. The front wheels bumped. The blanket wrapped fire bomb jumped into the air, but nothing happened as it fell back. Logan heard a crash. That would be highway fence posts. The sedan had apparently smashed right through them.

The whole car bounced and bucked then. Logan heard a distinct popping sound and immediately a stream of grey smoke came from beneath the blanket. The fire bomb had exploded.

For a second he thought that car and all was sailing through thin air. Then there was a crash. The car swerved halfway around as front wheels buckled in a shallow, muddy ditch. Logan felt himself thrown upward. His head struck the blanket rack and he dropped back, half stunned.

Through his mind ran one dominating thought—that he must not pass out. The blanket, encompassing the fire bomb, was holding the flames in check so far and it had kept the bomb from hurling its contents in every direction, but the blanket was beginning to burn.

Summoning every ounce of energy he possessed, Logan forced himself into a kneeling position. The car had stopped, its front smashed into a mess of crumpled fenders and broken

wheels. The window above Logan was cracked, but the shatterproof glass still held.

Logan lay on his back, raised his feet and began slamming his heels at the shattered glass. It gave and very soon he had a fairly spacious hole dug out of the frame. But the fresh air that swept in was double crossing him for it provided plenty of oxygen for that burning blanket and tongues of flame were beginning to shoot up.

Logan drew himself up, dragging Newcombe with him. He thrust his head through the hole in the window. He began wriggling, heedless of the small bits of glass that tore his clothing and lacerated his flesh. What was a little spilled blood to the ghastly form of death that was rapidly consuming the car?

He was half in and half out of the window when he managed to set his chin against the door ever. He pushed hard. The door swung open. Newcombe fell out and pulled Logan after him.

Inside the car a terrific explosion told its story of fire and gasoline. Logan, bruised and sore, began crawling away, dragging Newcombe after him. Logan sprawled between two bogs, in the swampy ground toward which a kindly fate had directed the car. Newcombe opened his eyes and tried to figure things out.

"Turn around," Logan directed, "and get these ropes off my wrists."

Newcombe seemed to gather some degree of confidence from Logan's tone. He jabbered of his innocence as he worked. Then he got the ropes free. A car, passing by, stopped when its driver was attracted by the flames. He came running through the marsh. Logan hailed him, identified himself and was fumbling in his pocket for his handcuff keys as he directed the driver to forget all about speed laws and get back to town.

In a moment he had the cuffs off and he drew a long breath of relief. They were rolling along at a fast clip when Logan thought of Tom Brophy. He estimated the spot where they had thrown Brophy out.

"Stop here," he told the driver. Lo-

gan got out, saw the place where Brophy's body had rolled across the dusty shoulders, spotted a few drops of blood and followed the trail to a dense bush beside the road. Brophy lay there, half conscious and unable to move. Logan carried him back to the car.

THEY REACHED the city limits and a radio car came swooping out of a side street in pursuit of this speed demon. The siren sounded like an angel's chorus to Logan.

He gave crisp orders when both cars came to a stop. One radio patrolman was assigned to get Brophy to a hospital and then take Newcombe to headquarters. Brophy was able to talk before they hauled him away.

"Boy, was that guy a lousy shot," he grinned weakly. "He practically had his roscoe stuck down my throat and he only blasted away half my shoulder and my hip. Won't he be surprised when I get up in court and testify him into a cell for about ninety-nine years."

"Sure," Logan said. "That's the away to talk. I'll nail the guy and salt him down until they let you loose."

Logan was driven straight to Spanish Cavas' gambling boat. He reached Cavas' office, flung the door wide and walked up to the desk. Cavas stared at his torn clothing, his singed hair and blackened flesh.

"What happened?" he gasped.

"Some of Joe Moore's gentle little playboys tried to frame a deal on me and the kid. He's at headquarters. How about taking a ride down?"

Cavas put on his hat, headed toward Logan and then skidded to a stop. He turned around, went back to ish Cavas' gambling boat. He took out a cracked blue poker chip and thrust this into his vest pocket.

"Luck token," he grinned. "All gamblers believe in 'em. This one was my last chip with the pot holding about forty grand of my dough. I won, so I kept the chip."

"Sure," Logan said. "Let's see it."

Cavas got the chip out and extended his hand toward Logan. The chip was snatched from his fingers

and a handcuff closed about his wrist.

"Hey," Cavas protested heatedly, "you don't have to go to extremes."

"With murderers the orders are—handcuffs," Logan snapped. "You knocked off poor Benny because he gave me the dough, You framed the the whole deal on Joe Moore. That fifty grand was meant for you. When you got your filthy paws on it, you'd have sent young Newcombe home to his papa with a warning that if he sang, you'd reveal him for a killer. That's been worked before so don't think you're smarter than the next next would-be big shot."

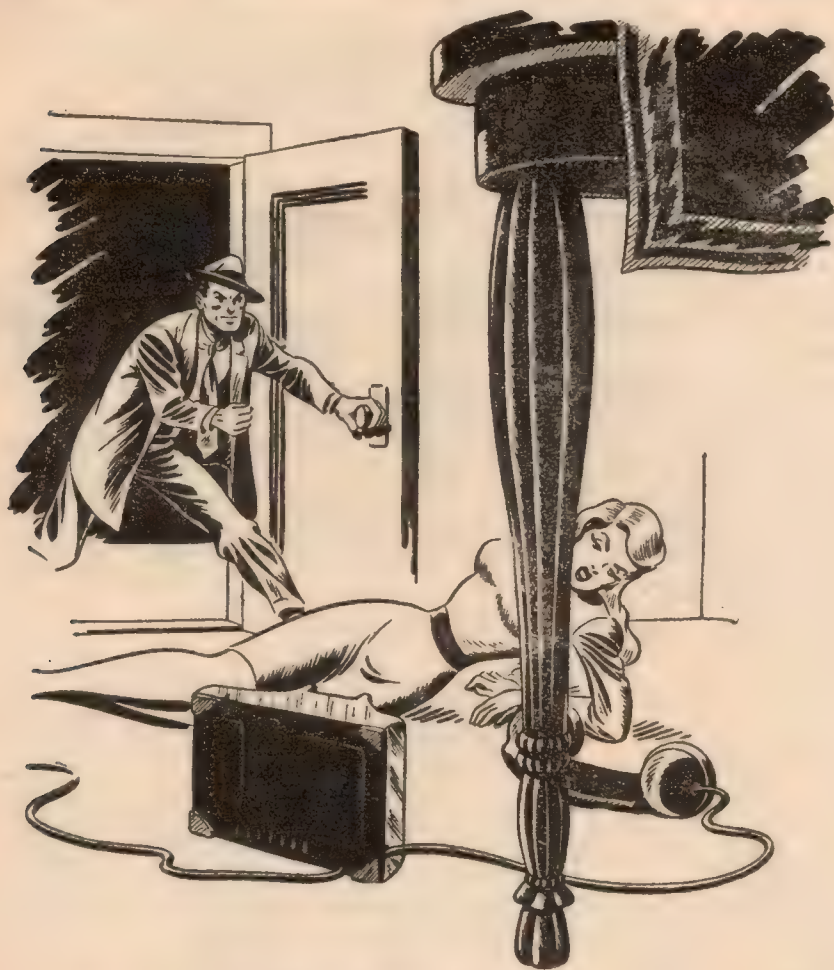
"You see," Logan told Cavas, "Fresnay and Ramon only pretended to be part of Moore's mob. They kidnapped a police driver, hijacked young Newcombe and me and talked plenty loud so the police driver could hear every word. Then they threw him out, put a couple of slugs in him where they'd hurt, but not kill, and left him for a passing motorist to find. That driver's testimony would strap Moore into the chair except for one thing. Benny, the poor half witted newsman, was my friend. He detested everyone who operated against the law—called them 'bad men'. You fell into that classification. You used him as a 'go between' on other instances. When you found out that Benny had made me a present of that money, you walloped him. That was a mistake, because Benny only needed to get within reach of you, Cavas. I kept him straight for years because on the loose he'd have been the cleverest pickpocket we'd ever have known despite his lack of brains. He picked your pocket, trying to get a clue that would lead to you. He knew enough to do that because he was sure you'd kill him. He found that blue chip and I took it out of his pocket. When I visited your office the first time, I put the chip on your desk when you weren't looking. I saw you pick it up.

Cavas looked down at his knees and groaned. "And I thought it was a lucky blue chip."

CASE OF THE CAPTIVATING REDHEAD

By DOUGLAS MACLAREN

Automobiles have some strange gadgets these days. For instance, a number for hit-and-run drivers which knocks young girls off the road and then leaves rope marks on their throats . .



She had the telephone off the table!

YOU ARE hit sort of hard when you hear that a girl you know has been killed.

You are harder hit when that death was violent, messy.

You grab a double-sotch—when you remember that only yesterday you held that girl in your arms.

George Markal, standing behind the bar at the Lakeside Tavern, poured himself that double-sotch. No one seemed to notice or particularly give a damn. The talk running up and down the bar was about red-headed Dolly Mattson whose banged-up body had been found in the

**WHETHER SHE WAS ALIVE OR DEAD, SHE MADE MEN
BURN!**

bushes fringing the mountain road out of Lakeside.

Markal rinsed his glass and put it on a towel on the sink drain under the bar. He moved along behind the bar to where his partner, Charlie Oggen, was listening to a skinny grocery clerk who claimed the distinction of having discovered the body. The clerk was sounding off importantly.

"I seen the body as I was driving in to open the store. The fog was lifting and all I saw was the legs. Dolly's legs would've stopped any car, any time. Mind you, I didn't touch the body." He sniggered. "The Law won't even let you be a gentleman. I just got a good look, saw who it was and drove over here like hell to the State Police booth." The clerk saw George Markal join the group and added for his benefit: "Mr. Markal, Dolly was sure in awful shape. Some hit-run driver smacked her clean off the road."

George Markal asked: "What was she doing walking along the mountain road at night?"

"That's easy, Mr. Markal. Dolly was ripe pickings for anything that wore pants. She was trying to get herself picked up."

Markal leaned his elbows on the bar and looked steadily at the little clerk. "Did you find Dolly easy pickings, Freddie?"

Charlie Oggen guffawed at that, throwing back his tawny-haired head. His tight-fitting T-shirt rippled and swelled with the play of his muscles. Charlie cut quite the figure of a virile man. He started to drape his arm, friendly—like, around his partner's shoulders, but thought better of it. For George Markal was a cold man, forbidding; people didn't paw him. Instead, Charlie Oggen slapped the bar and roared:

"Did you hear that, boys? Freddie—and Dolly! That's one for the book—and a round on the House." Setting up the round, Oggen said to Markal: "You called him, George ole pardner. You wouldn't let Freddie malign the dead—not that much!.... Drink up, boys!"

Freddie shrank out of the lime-light and kept his eyes on the floor as though searching for a cuspidor to crawl into.

Markal left the group. He went back to his favorite scotch bottle and poured himself another double shot. He knocked it off and again rinsed the glass. When he looked up he saw Cutty Harwood, her beautiful nose in the air, cross the tavern with her stately wiggle and take an empty booth.

The raucous chatter at the bar died to suppressed wolf whistles.

A barfly whispered: "Miss High—an'—Mighty is in kinda early in the morning for her hair of the dog."

Markal was studiously rinsing glasses when Cutty flashed him a dazzling smile. The smile froze on Cutty's face when Markal didn't raise his eyes to meet hers. Cutty made a very casual business of taking a gold cigarette case from her emerald—green bellhop jacket. She fired the over—size cigarette with a gold lighter. Then she glanced toward Charlie Oggen.

OGGEN CAME around the bar in a flash and was bowing to her in what might be termed courtly fashion. "Ah, good morning—"

The girl's voice was low, throaty: "Bourbon over ice. And send it over with that stuffy jackass partner of yours."

Charlie Oggen bowed again, gave the blonde a tight smile and said so that all could hear: "I'm right sorry to hear about poor Dolly Mattson. I'll bet you're gonna miss a good maid like her."

Cutty's look said that she was going to miss Dolly Mattson. Then she lowered her voice to a whisper: "I found Dolly's diary—you big, sweet gorilla mans."

All the ruddy color left Charlie Oggen's face. He stood there staring into the icy, amber brilliance of Cutty's eyes. He licked his lips twice before he got his mouth going: "So you found her diary. It's no skin off my back."

Cutty pursed her wet-looking lips

and nodded slowly. "Yes, Charlie, it will be skins off your back—frogskins. Nice green ones, and plenty of 'em. You'd better come out to my place late this afternoon—and talk about it." Cutty grinned at the sudden narrowing of Charlie Oggen's eyes. "You can skip the rugged thoughts, Charlie. If I meet with an accident—say, hit-run trouble—the diary will be turned over to the State Police."

Charlie Oggen leaned over the blonde. "Dolly's diary means nothing to me."

She laughed into his face. "You know as well as I do what is written in it. Now, run along and rustle up that drink."

Oggen backed several steps from the table, bowed again, saying: "I'll send over your drink, Miss Harwood."

Just as Oggen reached the bar a man rushed into the tavern. He was Wilkins, the liquor dealer. Wilkins called out to everyone in general:

"Something's up, folks—something big. I just came over the mountain where they've got Dolly Mattson's body. The State troopers must have found something. Sergeant Vannister is headed this way. He's already in town. He—"

The tavern door swung open again. Trooper-Sergeant Vannister, a militant, natty figure in his black-striped grays, strode down the row of log-cabin-like booths. A .45 caliber Colt, butt forward, rocked on his left thigh. He walked to the bar and flicked back his campaign hat. Only then were his eyes noticeable. They were blood-shot eyes, burning brightly out of dark hollows. Those eyes touched everyone in the tavern, briefly, impersonally, with no sign of recognition. Then he spoke, his voice a whiplash of tautly held feeling:

"Automobiles seem to have some strange gadgets these days. Modern conveniences—for all kinds of people." The tavern was quiet, expectant. Vannister pressed his back to the bar, the fingers of his left hand toying with the lanyard anchored to his Colt butt. "But you all

haven't heard of the latest device. It's a specialty number for hit-run drivers." His feverish eyes raked the room. "This latest gadget knocks young girls off the road—and leaves rope marks on their throats."

Two glasses crashing to the floor shattered the silence of the tavern. Fully a dozen people jerked in startled, nervous reaction. There were sharp, ragged intakes of breath.

Sergeant Vannister looked over his shoulder, put his hot eyes on George Markal and Charlie Oggen. Both Markal and Oggen were staring down at broken shot glasses at their feet.

First to recover was Markal. He raised his eyes to meet Vannister's, and said: "That means the girl was murdered."

"That it does, George," said the sergeant. "Dolly was strangled with a green ribbon. We found it in the bushes about a mile from—er—the body." Vannister glanced at Charlie Oggen, waited for him to say something.

Oggen spread his hands, let them flap to his sides. "It's pure hell, Van."

"It is just that, Charlie."

To regain a measure of lost lime-light, grocery-clerk Freddie said: "There's one thing about this—uh—murder that doesn't fit, Sergeant. And here's my question: Why should a fancy fluff like Dolly have to work the mountain road for a pickup? She could've done all right here in the village."

Vannister's eyes got nasty. "Dolly was no pickup!"

Freddie flinched from the sergeant's sudden anger. "Now, listen, Sergeant, I didn't mean anything against the girl. I just—"

Markal said to no one in particular: "Freddie discovered the girl's body and reported it." Then to Freddie: "Here's one on the House." He set up the highball, then started to move down the bar.

But Sergeant Vannister wasn't letting the subject drop. "I don't want to hear any more talk like that. Dolly was a sweet kid. I had asked her to marry me."

Markal was drawing a beer. He stared at Vannister as the suds cascaded over the rim of the glass. Markal's expression might have meant anything. The suds running over his wrist brought his mind back to the beer. He flicked the tap.

Charlie Oggen looked very solemn as he said: "Dolly was certainly a very fine girl."

Freddie nearly choked on his highball.

OVER IN her booth Cutty Harwood drummed long fingers impatiently on the table. Her amber eyes darted between Markal and Sergeant Vannister.

The trooper tugged his campaign hat down over his forehead and strode to the door. On the threshold he turned back to face the tavern. "Dolly was murdered last night between eleven and three. Now get this: No car went over the mountain after ten o'clock last night. The excavation at the other end caved in. This means whoever killed Dolly didn't go over the mountain. In other words, the murder came back here to Lakeside." Vannister turned on his heel and went out of the tavern.

Cutty Harwood's imperious voice lashed across the bang of the door: "Where the hell is my drink?"

Charlie Oggen was helping himself to a good stiff jolt. Cutty Harwood's voice jarred him. He wiped the back of his hand across his mouth and glanced at George Markal. "George," he called down the bar, "will you take Miss Harwood a bourbon—ice?"

Markal nodded without looking over at the blonde's booth. With the drink poured he went around the bar end, passing Charlie Oggen.

Oggen whispered: "She called you a stuffy jackass."

Markal didn't change expression. He went over and set the drink on the table before the girl. He turned and was about to walk away when Cutty said:

"You were a friend of Dolly Mattson's weren't you, *Mister* George Markal?"

Markal studied her bright amber eyes. "Yes," he said quietly.

Cutty sipped her bourbon. "I found Dolly's diary."

Markal inclined his head in polite curiosity. He prompted: "Yes?"

"A cool character, aren't you?" asked Cutty. "I knew you would be." She gave him a dazzling smile. "Want to lay a bet that I can take that smug smirk off your face?"

Markal quietly took a wallet from his back pocket, fingered out a thousand-dollar bill and laid it on the table before her. "Are you covering me?" he asked politely.

Cutty stared at the crisp, new bill. Her small, even teeth scraped a layer of lipstick from her full underlip. Her orange-red fingernails flicked the bill across the table. "I'll put my I.O.U.—"

"Tables stakes," interrupted Markal.

Anger put yellow flecks in Cutty's eyes. "My honor should be good enough for—"

"Tables stakes," Markal gently insisted.

Cutty stiffened as though she had been slapped. Now, hatred was a cold, white fire in her amber eyes. She moved her mouth slowly, mechanically, as if biting off the words: "I'm going to get a hell of a lick out of doing what I'm going to do to you."

One of the men at the bar was making himself heard above everyone else in the tavern: "You—all heard what Sergeant Vannister said. He as good as said that the murderer was right here in Lakeside!"

Freddie took his nose out of his highball and added: "You know what he *didn't* say?" When no one answered him, Freddie went right on: "The sergeant didn't say—God Almighty help the one who killed Dolly!" Then Freddie shut up.

George Markal half-turned to the bar and raised his voice to reach his partner: "Charlie, set up another for Freddie." Then Markal turned back to Cutty. "You were saying, Miss Harwood—?"

"Oh, yes," Cutty's light tones

matched Markal's. All the anger and hatred had disappeared. "It almost slipped my mind." She lowered her voice. "The last entry in Dolly Mattson's diary concerned you."

"The last entry?" murmured Markal. "Sounds ominous."

"Ominous is the word for it, *Mister* Markal. And to show you I'm not just beating my gums, you might take a look at this." Cutty took a folded piece of white paper from her emerald-green bellhop jacket. Taking her sweet time about it, she unfolded the paper and spread it on the waxed table-top. "This," said Cutty, "is a note Dolly Mattson made of what she wanted to enter in the diary. You'll find it most—ominous."

Markal read the bold penciled scrawl:

Tonight it will be George Markal again. George always makes me feel like the lady, which I am not.

A wavy line was drawn across the sheet; directly under the wavy line was:

George could have joyfully killed me tonight. Anyway, he's fun—I'll have an answer for him tomorrow night.

Cutty put the paper back into her pocket, saying: "Those entries were made in Dolly's diary under the date of August Sixth, the night before last. And you will notice her reference to last night—the night she was murdered." Cutty grinned up into Markal's cool impersonal eyes and asked: "Are there any doubts in your mind about that being Dolly's handwriting?"

"No doubts," said Markal quietly.

CUTTY INCLINED her golden head. "We're progressing famously. I can assure you that the entries in the diary are word for word the same as in the note. Any doubts, *Mister* Markal?"

"No doubts."

Cutty finished her bourbon-ice. "I might suggest that you come out to Harwood Manor early this afternoon to—er—discuss the diary." She got

to her feet and looked down at the thousand-dollar bill on the table.

"You'd better bring this along with you."

Markal's eyes never left hers as he said: "I'm quite forgetful at times. Perhaps you'd better take it along with you now."

The blonde searched Markal's face for long seconds, and learned nothing. She had picked up the crisp bill and carefully folded it into quarters, creasing the edges with her fingernails. Then she faced away from the bar, raised her dress and tucked the bill into her stocking top.

Markal's eyes followed her movements. He'd never seen a prettier leg in his life. He said: "Even at these prices—it's worth it."

George Markal drove his two-door sedan between two high brick pillars. There was an iron grille-work arch connecting the pillars. In the center of the grille, directly over the driveway, was an ornate sign proclaiming: *Harwood Manor*.

The huge, spreading lawns on each side of the driveway were neatly mown. The hedges immediately flanking the driveway were clipped, but those nearer the tennis and badminton courts were not as well barbered.

Markal drove into a big circular area before the entrance to the mansion. The blue gravel had been recently raked. There were no other cars in the circle which could have accommodated a dozen. Markal got out and rang the bell. He looked through the screen door and saw four red-tile steps leading up to the floor level of the foyer.

Heel clicks came from the left of the foyer. The clicks were not the hurried steps of a servant, but rather a measured, somewhat insolent, leisurely cadence. Blonde Cutty Harwood came down the short steps to the screen door. She was wearing the same bellhop jacket. She opened the door, saying:

"Welcome to Harwood Manor, *Mister* Markal. I don't believe you've been here before."

Markal bowed easily and stepped in. "I've never been blackmailed before."

Cutty led the way to the left, laughing over her shoulder: "I hope you like being blackmailed here."

The room on the left was the biggest living room Markal had ever seen off a movie screen. It was baronial in size, with a fireplace large enough to walk around in. Markal smiled, stood with his hands on his hips, looking around the place.

"It'll be a pleasure," he said. "Maybe."

Cutty curled herself cozily on a huge sofa and nodded toward a coffee table set with cocktail shaker and glasses. "I hope you like my poor efforts at your chosen profession."

Markal poured the Manhattans, gave the blonde one and held his glass in front of his chest. He made no motion to taste it or sit down. He said: "You mentioned a diary. Isn't the grand enough to buy it?"

Cutty smiled sweetly, shook her head.

Markal walked to the mantel over the fireplace. He reached up and ran a finger along the mantel; then held up his dusty fingers for her to see. "You might use some of the brand for household help—"

"Go right on being smart," put in Cutty, "and I'll raise the first payment to five thousand."

Markal then tasted his cocktail. "Very good. What makes you think that I'll be sucker enough to pay?"

"I'll tell you," said blonde Cutty. "The electric chair. The last entry in Dolly Mattson's diary concerns you—very definitely." Cutty leaned back against the cushions and looked up at Markal. "Wouldn't Sergeant Vannister like to get his hands on that diary?"

"If he did—that would end your blackmail."

Cutty laughed softly, her amber eyes very bright and hard. "I'll take the chance of you weakening before I do."

Markal silently finished his cocktail, put the glass on the table. He thrust his hands into his trousers' pockets and sauntered across the liv-

ing room toward the foyer. There, he leisurely started up the wide staircase. He was halfway up the stairs when Cutty reached the foyer. She called angrily:

"Where the hell do you think you're going?"

Markal ignored her and kept climbing. Cutty pounded up the steps and reached the midway landing the same time as he did. She was flushed and her eyes were mean. Before she could say a word, Markal put the flat of his hand against her chest and pushed her gently backward into a big armchair on the landing. The back of Cutty's knees hit the chair and she lost balance, flopping into the seat.

GEORGE MARKAL looked down at her with cold, expressionless eyes. "Get in my way again, Baby, and—" He stopped, his eyes shifting to the long window at the on the blue-graveled parking arena before the front door. Just entering the arena and breaking to a stop was a State Police car.

Trooper-Sergeant Vannister got out, glanced at Markal's car and walked toward the front door.

Markal said to Cutty: "We have a visitor, dear. We'll continue this little family squabble later."

Cutty twisted and looked out the window. She got to her feet, smoothed her dress very deliberately and gave Markal a wicked little chuckle. She descended the stairs with that stately, insolent wiggle of hers and walked toward the screen door.

"Why, Sergeant Vannister!" she called. "Welcome to Harwood Manor."

Markal went into the living room and stood in the center of the floor. As Vannister approached, Markal waited the same polite alertness with which he would watch a customer walk up to the bar and name a drink.

Vannister kept his campaign hat on, and his right hand toyed with his gunlanyard. He said to Cutty, at his side: "Sorry to bust in on you like this, Miss Harwood, but I figured that I might find Markal here." Van-

nister's hot eyes, more feverish now than before, raked over Markal's face. He asked: "Where were you last night and what were you doing?"

Markal said: "You mean, have I an alibi for last night? The answer is—no. I rowed around the lake a little, smoked a couple of pipes and turned in. Whether anyone saw me do these things, I don't know."

Cutty was very quietly studying Markal and nibbling at her underlip in what might have been indecision.

That," said Vannister, "might be right tough on you, George Markal, especially on account of the murder last night of—your ex-wife."

It was said around Lakeside that nothing on earth, or above it, could shock or surprise Cutty Harwood. Yet Vannister's last words brought a sharp gasp from her and her controlled mouth now hung open with the stunned surprise of any village moron. Then she caught hold of herself. Peel after peel of harsh laughter ripped from her throat.

Vannister flicked her a sidewise glance.

Markal's eyes looked at and through her. He didn't seem to see her. He might have been looking back at bitter, unhappy years.

Then Cutty's laughter changed to brittle, mocking chuckles. "Think of it! My maid, my personal maid, was the wife of—*Mister Stuffed-shirt George Markal*. It's killing me!"

Vannister said flatly: "I don't find it so funny, Miss Harwood. I was in love with Dolly Mattson—asked her to marry me."

Cutty went right on chuckling.

Markal said to the trooper-sergeant: "My marriage to Dolly and her divorce are a matter of public record. I'm surprised that Dolly didn't tell you about it herself—seeing what love-birds you were."

Vannister's eyes glowed from their dark hollows. "Don't start cracking funny, Markal. I'm not one to take it. Keep your answers impersonal—and tell me why you made such a secret of your marriage and divorce."

"I might," said Markal, "have want

ed to forget all about it."

The trooper shook his head. "That's not the way I see it. Since the murder, people around the village have come to us with information. Dolly was seen in your car on several occasions." His voice became a whiplash of anger: "Does that sound like you wanted to forget all about it? What is closer to the truth—is that you tried to get her to come back to you...and got rough when she refused."

THEN VANNISTER asked Cutty, "What is Markal doing here?"

Cutty was again very thoughtful, nibbling at her lower lip. A glint of eagerness touched with a shadow of apprehension showed in her amber eyes. She said slowly:

"This morning, Sergeant Vannister, I told you that Dolly had mentioned to me recently that she was having dates with someone named 'George'. I never in the world dreamed that it might be *Mister George Markal*, our toplofty bartender. Well, when I mentioned this to him off-handedly—he offered me a bribe to keep my mouth shut."

Vannister said: "That will strengthen our case, Miss Harwood... if you can prove it in court."

George Markal was carefully watching both Cutty Harwood and Vannister.

Vannister's right hand slid down his lanyard to the butt of his .45 Colt. Hot hatred burned through the red-ribbing of his bloodshot eyes. "Markal, if you killed the girl I loved—"

Cutty said: "If you want proof—here it is! A thousand-dollar bill—" She snatched up her dress to pluck at the bill in her stocking top.

Even a stone post would have turned to see that flash of Cutty's legs. Vannister, being just a man with a man's instincts, let his eyes flick down.

Markal, waiting for that diversion of attention from himself, drove his fist to Vannister's jaw. Markal had measured his target, was balanced and set to strike. That one punch

did the trick. Vannister went down and out.

Then Markal ran across the room and pounced on Cutty just as she reached the foyer telephone. He grabbed her shoulders and faced her toward him. "Don't try messing with me now. I'll clip you one."

He turned her around and drew both of her hands behind her back. Holding them with one of his hands, he slipped off his belt and bound her wrists securely. Cutty's eyes were murderous but she kept her mouth shut. Markal picked her up and dumped her on the divan. He took the thousand-dollar bill from her stocking top and put it in his wallet.

Next he peeled off her stockings with two quick flips. Then he replaced her shoes and secured her bare ankles with his necktie. He gagged her with his breast-pocket handkerchief, and didn't bother to look at the cold fury in her eyes.

Markal took the stockings over to the unconscious trooper and knotted them around his wrists and ankles. He used a handkerchief of Vannister's and one of his own to gag him. Then he carried the trooper to a clothes closet and set him down inside it.

Going outdoors, he drove the trooper's car around to the back of the house and parked it in Cutty's garage. By the time he got back to the living room he found that Cutty had rolled off the divan and was wriggling across the floor toward the telephone stand in the foyer. Angry frustration twisted her face when she saw Markal coming toward her.

HHE SCOOPED her up in his arms and carried her up the broad staircase to the landing. On the landing he paused a moment to glance out the window at the parking area in front of the house. He told the gagged and furious Cutty: "No one is going to interrupt us this time." She glub-glubbed something through her gag. Markal went up a shorter flight of steps to the second floor.

Cutty's eyes were narrow and watchful as he set her on her feet in the corridor. She was perfectly still

as he untied his necktie from around her ankles and took his belt from her wrists.

Markal said: "I'm not going to lug you up another flight of steps." He grasped her arm and they went up to the third floor of the mansion. Still holding her arm, he opened a door off the corridor. The room was vacant, used partially as a storeroom. The next door he opened was a bedroom. Markal's dark, somber eyes flickered over it and he stepped back, closing the door.

Cutty nodded her blonde head vigorously and made noises in her gag. Markal untied the handkerchief from her mouth. He asked:

"Well—?"

"If you are looking for Dolly's room," said Cutty, "That was it."

Markal's eyes got ugly. "Try being cute just once more—and see what happens."

Cutty went silently as he pulled her along the corridor. Her expression was wooden as Markal opened the next door.

Markal said: "This is it." He stood on the threshold, looking at the dolls, be-ribboned teddy bears and other carnival prizes that festooned the frame of Dolly's vanity mirror. On the vanity was a cluster of miniature whiskey bottles, empty. Markal said: "Dolly Mattson lived here." He went over to the vanity and looked closely at an unadorned yellow teddy bear. He was a large, perky looking teddy with the imprint, *Chateau Chartreuse Beach*, on his furry chest.

Cutty demanded: "What are you looking cow-eyed at?"

"Permit a bit of sentiment," said Markal. "I gave that bear to Dolly on our honeymoon." He pushed Cutty rather roughly toward the bed and pressed her down to a sitting position on its edges. Then he said quietly:

"When Dolly lived with me she kept a diary. One day I found it by chance and learned, quite definitely, that she—er—had other interests. She kept this diary in a pretty fair hiding place." He jerked his thumb toward a clothes closet. "Is that where you found it?"

Cutty's startled look brought a tight smile to Markal's face. He said: "You not only found it there but thought it a pretty good hiding place, yourself." Markal walked over toward the closet, keeping an eye on the girl. He nodded toward the chair against the wall right beside the closet door.

"Dolly used to keep a chair right like this in our home."

Markal opened the closet door, backed slightly into it and looked up at the inside top of the door frame. up there, held by a wooden bracket nailed to the frame, was a red-leather book. He came out of the closet again, stepped up on the conveniently placed chair and reached the book. Then he stepped off the chair and onto the floor.

Cutty couldn't take her eyes from the book. Oaths dropped from her lips with the steady monotony of a dripping sewer.

George Markal tapped the book. "Dolly always favored red leather for her diaries." In the same conversational tone, he went on: "When you tossed me to the law downstairs, you also tossed away that grand I gave you—which means that you expected to get a hell of a lot more from someone else." He opened the diary and thumbed through the pages. He stopped at one page where the name, Tommy Vannister, caught his eye. The entry, in Dolly Mattson's bold, neat, faultlessly penned writing, read:

Tommy Vannister tonight. We will hold hands again. He will bring me up to date on his traffic patrols again. He will ask me again to marry him. He will kiss me again—maybe twice, if he's feeling real devilish.

A wavy line was drawn across the page. Then:

Tommy was real devilish tonight. I chased him home and came up here alone to get slightly plastered. I wish I hadn't wasted the night with Tommy—when I might have been with my big sweet gorilla mans!

Markal glanced over at Cutty. She was watching him narrowly. Markal went back to the diary, flipping through the pages to the last entry. He found it under the heading of August sixth. And it was the exact wording that Cutty had shown in the tavern. He closed the book and said to Cutty:

"You weren't fooling."

Cutty crossed her bare legs with not only her knees showing. Her amber eyes burned into Markal's. She made her voice earnest, caressing: "What are you going to do with the diary, George?"

"So now it's 'George,'" observed Markal.

CUTTY GOT to her feet, moved over close to Markal. She put one hand on his shoulder. "Look, George, I'm going to give you this straight: I would never have gone on the witness stand against you. When the sergeant said that you had her diary. Honest, George, I just you had an idea where to look for her diary. Honest, George, I just wanted you out of the way so you wouldn't get the diary. I was afraid of you. That's the God's honest truth." Cutty was putting the old dazzle into her smile now. "An as far as your assualting an officer goes—well, I can throw my weight behind you and smooth it over."

"What weight?" asked Markal gently. "The weight of a broken-down, debt-ridden estate and a little tramp who would do anything so she could keep on playing the rich lady?"

Cutty's eyes narrowed ever so slightly. "That's hard to take, George—but I'll take it... You know, I could alibi you on Dolly's murdered and say that you spent last night here with me."

"Thanks," said Markal. "But from a purely selfish viewpoint, I'd be smarter if I simply destroyed the diary."

Moving even closer to him, Cutty said: "The diary would mean a lot of money to me—to us."

Markal shrugged. "I don't want any

of it. As far as I'm concerned you can' blackmail every man in Lake-side—except me. I'd be a sucker to have this diary in circulation. No dice, Kiddo."

There was a sudden clatter of footsteps on the stairs leading from the second floor up to the third. More than one person was making that racket.

Markal's eyes shot to the open doorway to the corridor. Then he looked at the diary as if it were a stick of dynamite. He started to shove it into his pocket as he moved toward the door to slam it.

Cutty was moving, too. She punched at Markal's hand holding the diary. The book was jarred from his fingers and fell to the floor. Cutty promptly sat on it. Markal whirled to bowl her over and retrieve it.

A rough hand seized Markal from behind and turned him. Markal saw Vannister's fist coming, tried to roll his head with the blow. But there was enough power in the blow to send Markal staggering against the wall.

Trooper-Sergeant Vannister stalked him, swung again and bounced Markal's head off the wall. Markal's knees buckled. He slid down the wall and slumped in a sitting position. He tried to raise his groggy head from his chest.

Vannister said: "That evens one score."

Charlie Oggen had come into the room behind the trooper. Oggen walked over, put his hands on his narrow hips and wagged his tawny head. "I never figured George to be a murderer, Van. He never once let on that he had been married to Dolly." Oggen shook his head again.

Cutty, from her position on the floor, said to Oggen: "Stop shaking dandruff all over my house."

Oggen flushed a dull red, managed his best bar-room bow and said: "Why, Miss Harwood, let me help you up."

Cutty snapped: "I like it down here. What is good enough for George—is good enough for me.

What the hell are you doing here anyway?"

"Van," said Oggen, "Came to the tavern looking for George, and said that George had been married to Dolly and that the State Police wanted George. Van said he was going to stop here. I drove over as soon as I could. Downstairs on the clothes closet, I heard—"

"Okay, okay," said Cutty. She turned to George Markal who was sitting straight against the wall to let his head clear. She asked: "How's it coming, George?"

Markal smiled faintly, murmured: "Sit tight."

CUTTY SQUIRMED a little on the diary, and said nothing.

Vannister's red-ribbed eyes flicked from Cutty to Markal. He said to the blonde: "What are you two so chummy about—seeing that you are the State's star witness,"

"Star witness?" echoed Charlie Oggen. "Do you mean that—?"

Cutty looked up at Oggen. "Save your breath. The sergeant is wrong. He must have misunderstood me.. George Markal couldn't possibly have killed Dolly." Cutty averted her head a trifle, lowered her lashes. "George—well, George spent the night here...last night."

Vannister's eyes bored into Cutty's. "You are either lying now, or you were lying when you told me Markal tried to bribe you. Which is it?"

Cutty twisted around, tilted her head and glared along her aristocratic nose at Vannister and demanded: "Just who the hell do you think you are talking to?" Even sitting on the floor, she managed quite a queenly air.

"Then what," Vannister asked, "was all this talk about a thousand dollars?"

Cutty grinned. "What thousand dollars?"

Before Vannister could answer that, Markal asked him: "Did you find a piece of paper in Dolly's hand-bag this morning that had something

about her 'big, sweet gorilla mans' written on it?"

Vannister's face creased in a hard, tight grin. "As a matter of fact, we did. And the Law requires me to warn you that anything you might say will be used against you. But go right on talking."

Markal turned to Cutty. "You can hatch the diary now."

The girl straightened as if she doubted her hearing. Then she glared at Markal. "You double-crossing louse!"

Markal jerked his thumb at Cutty, saying to Vannister: "Cutty is roosting on Dolly's diary."

Oggen took a step toward Cutty, checked himself and looked from the girl to Vannister.

Vannister's eyes were wicked and sultry now. "Kick it over," he told the blonde.

Cutty sizzled her words at Markal, then she put her palms on the floor and raised her thighs off the red-covered diary. She drew one leg back and up, and kicked the diary. It skittered across the room and landed between Vannister and Charlie Oggen. She said: "All right, Markal, fry and be damned!"

Charlie Oggen stared in fascination at the diary at his feet. He bent to pick it up.

Vannister dropped his hand to his gun-butt, said: "Charlie, don't touch that book." He gestured with his free hand in the direction of Markal and Cutty. "Get over there with them."

Vannister jerked his head, saying nothing. When Oggen shrugged and crossed the room, Vannister picked up the diary. Then he backed to the wall and opened the book, letting his watchful eyes jump back and forth from the diary to the three people.

Cutty got to her feet as Charlie Oggen approached her. She moved away from him and sat on the edge of the bed. Oggen was between her and Markal.

Markal said to Vannister: "Try the entry for July Twenty-seventh. You won't like it."

The trooper-sergeant raised his eyes briefly to Markal, then thumbed

through to the 27th. As he read his ears got red and his face got white. He fastened his eyes on Markal, asked tightly: "You read—this?"

Markal nodded. "As you can see, Dolly got around a bit."

Vannister turned the pages to the last entry in the book under the heading of August 6th. He then snapped shut the diary, said to Markal: "I don't know why you gave me this book—it straps you in the chair." He then added in a cold, dead voice: "George Markal, I arrest you for the murder of Dolly Mattson—you—"

Cutty's laugh ripped across Vannister's curse. She said to Markal: "Well, you asked for it, you damned fool!"

Charlie Oggen ran his hand across his forehead. "George, I just can't believe it."

Markal said: "Charlie, what I'm going to do may make it tough for you. But it's got to be done." Then he told Vannister: "You probably noticed that Dolly's entries in her diary were written neatly and without mistakes. This was because Dolly always made notes of all her entries before copying them into the book—"

SUDDENLY Markal seized Cutty from behind and held her fast, while he said to Charlie Oggen: "Charlie, take the papers from her right pocket. Give them to the sergeant."

Cutty Harwood suddenly became a wildcat, squirming, twisting and thrashing about in Markal's arms. She braced herself in Markal's embrace and lashed out with both feet at Charlie as he tried to get near her.

Vannister came forward, demanding: "What is this? Let the girl go, Markal!"

But Charlie Oggen managed to move in on Cutty when Markal half-whirled her, swinging her lashing heels away from Charlie's direction. Charlie Oggen's hand came out of her pocket holding two folded pieces of paper. He handed them to Vannister.

Markal had his hands full with

Cutty. She tried to kick back at him, twisted her neck and tried to bite his face. He finally tossed her on the bed. She lay there, sprawled and spitting at him like a furious cat. Markal said coldly:

"Try coming at me and I'll crack your skull open." He turned to Vannister, saying: "Those two notes are the last of Cutty's blackmail. She's sort of miffed that I figured there would be two of them."

Vannister had opened one of the papers. He frowned and knitted his brow in puzzlement. Then he opened the other one, read it swiftly and said to Markal: "This is the same as the entry about you on the sixth, Markal. The other one is dated the seventh—yesterday."

"What does it say?" Markal asked.

Before Vannister could speak, Cutty said: "I'll tell you what it says. It says, 'Tonight I'll be with my big, sweet gorilla mans again'.... And who the hell do you think that is?"

Charlie Oggen turned pale. He said steadily: "Not me, Van. I wasn't with Dolly last night."

Cutty's sharp laugh was almost a shriek. "In a dozen places in the diary, Mister Sergeant, you'll find reference to Charlie Oggen as the 'sweet gorilla.'" She turned on Charlie. "And now aren't you glad that you took those papers from me?... The hell with all of you!"

Vannister's hand was firmly on the butt of his Colt. He asked in a tight voice: "Well, Charlie—?"

Charlie Oggen raised protesting hands. "Take it easy, Van. I wasn't with Dolly last night. We had a date—but she stood me up. Honest, Van—I wasn't with her."

"Where were you, Charlie?"

"Charlie shrugged a little helplessly. "I had two bottles with me—for the date with Dolly. I sat down in the woods and got boiled by myself. Then I staggered home and passed out cold. That's the honest truth, Van."

Markal said: "Dolly did stand up Charlie, Sergeant. He's telling the truth about that." Then Markal added: "Last night—Dolly never left

this room.... alive."

Cutty reared up on the bed. "I suppose you're going to say that I killed her!"

MARKAL IGNORED her and quietly faced Vannister. "Didn't you say, Sergeant, that a green ribbon was figured to have strangled Dolly?" When Vannister nodded slowly, Markal went on: "Your lab tests will show that the ribbon has yellow fur on it—like on that little bear over there by the mirror."

Cutty leaped off the bed, placing the bed between her and the three men. She whirled and ran into the bathroom. As she slammed the door, she yelled: "Damn every one of you!" The lock snicked.

Vannister stared unbelievably at Markal. "Why—?"

Markal said: "Cutty was poking her nose into Dolly's diary—and killed her when the blackmail looked best. Charlie and I were the suckers who would have kept Cutty living like a princess."

"Listen!" said Vannister, moving toward the bathroom door. "She's taking out the screen." He threw himself against the door. The panel held firm.

Charlie Oggen hurled his weight against the door. It crashed in. The room was empty. Markal and Oggen didn't cross the threshold. Vannister went over to the open window and looked down. He turned and came back into the bedroom.

Charlie Oggen said: "She must have had a couple of screws loose."

"They're all loose—now," said Vannister. "That window is a three-story drop to the stone terrace in the rear."

Charlie Oggen walked out of the bedroom, shaking his head, and went toward the stairs.

Trooper-Sergeant Vannister put the diary in his pocket. Then he took down the yellow teddy bear from beside Dolly's vanity mirror. He stuffed the bear into his pocket and went out of the room.

George Markal paused and looked at the empty place where the little bear had hung. Then he slowly walked out of the room.

"MOIDER DA BUM!"

By FRANK MORRIS

*If you threaten to bash somebody's head in, don't do it in public
just before they find him beaten to death . . .*



Eddie swung with a right hook!

HE PUSHED impatiently on the buzzer, waited a few seconds and pushed it again. He could hear it buzz inside, but there was no answer, and he rapped his knuckles vigorously on the panel. The door moved a little from the force of the knocking and opened a thin crack. Funny that the pudgy promoter should leave his door unlocked. He pushed it wider, and

called to Mike Diamond.

Maybe the fat man was out in the kitchen and hadn't heard the knock. He pushed the door wider and stepped into the thickly carpeted room. Only the flickering light from the cozy dancing blaze in the fireplace lighted the room. Perhaps Mike Diamond was asleep on the big davenport before the fire. He stepped around the end to see.

"Mike!" he called again. "Oh, Mike! Are you—"

Then he saw the pudgy man. He was sprawled on the floor in front of the davenport, one arm curled beneath his chin, the other outflung as though reaching for something beyond his grasp. There was an angry welt across the left temple, and a cake of dried blood on the left cheek. What was left of his features was just a red pulp, with eyes set in a cold stony stare. On the hearth lay a fire poker, thick and sticky looking.

Mike Diamond had been a pudgy little man, almost as broad as he was tall, with black hair beginning to gray, and a swarthy skin. His beak of a nose perched over a small neatly-trimmed mustache, and his lips were full and sensuous.

Never before had young Eddie Martin seen murder. Like a fighter coming out of the shock of a terrific right cross, he saw the tumbled furniture, the twisted pillows on the davenport, the overturned table and the small radio on the floor. He knew suddenly that someone had done for the promoter, and the shock of it set him back on his heels. His mind cleared with a snap, and his jaw tightened.

He had to get out of there—fast.

Eddie Martin was scared. He admitted it. In the ring, with gloves on his mitts, he wasn't afraid of any man his size. He knew how to fight; he could take care of himself. But murder was something he didn't know anything about. Something at which he couldn't strike back.

Eddie stood on his feet, and threw a wild glance around the room. He was nearly an even six feet tall, broad shoulders sloping down to narrow hips. His curly hair was so dark a brown it was almost black. His brown eyes were wide-spaced, his nose aquiline, and his full lips turned slightly at the corners, as if always wanting to smile.

The police would learn all too quickly of the quarrel he'd had that afternoon with Mike Diamond down at the gym. And Mike's threat to take up his contract, blackball him from

the ring. That would be motive enough for the cops; they'd land Eddie Martin behind the bars with a murder rap against him. Hell, he hadn't known she was Mike's girl friend until Jim Henry had told him. All he'd done was smile at her sitting there in the seats at ringside, while he was punching the bag. Then Mike had blown up.

EDDIE SOFTLY closed the door of Mike Diamond's apartment behind him and stood there a moment, to look up and down the empty corridor. There was something he ought to do. It wasn't right to go away, as if there were no evil back there in that silent apartment. He ought to notify the police that there was a dead man in there. That there was murder in that room. But he didn't dare call the police. They'd pin the murder on him. He turned and hastened down the corridor to the elevator.

The indicator showed it was on the way to the top floor. By the time it could descend, he could be down the three flights and out on the street. It wouldn't do for the elevator operator to see him, to be able to identify him as the man in Mike Diamond's apartment about the time of the murder. He ran all the way down the stairs, slowed as he approached the lobby, then assumed an air of unhurried nonchalance.

"Wasn't Mr. Diamond in?" the clerk asked as he passed the desk.

"Yeah. He was in." Eddie cursed softly under his breath. Why hadn't the man been too busy to notice him?

At home, he stumbled across the room and flopped full length across the bed. He lit a cigarette, took a couple of drags, crushed it out, lit another. He rose and paced the floor nervously. He should be doing something, but what was there to do?

He tried to pull his scrambled thoughts together.

Who could have bashed in the promoter's head? Roddell? Hell, Old Harry never bothered anyone. He was happy as Eddie's manager. Certainly the argument that afternoon wasn't cause enough for murder. Besides,

Harry'd had arguments with Mike Diamond before. Just because the promoter had shoved the old man aside to get at Eddie, and Roddell had tripped and fallen, was no cause for murder. That was when Eddie had hit the promoter and knocked him down, because he'd shoved Harry like that. Not because of the girl.

Jim Henry, the lanky trainer? No reason there, either. Jim was content as Eddie's sparring partner. He wasn't sore at Mike Diamond or anyone else, as far as Eddie knew. Jim and Mike always seemed to get along all right together. Sure, Mike had been Jim's manager at the time Jim Henry was on the way to the top. But he'd burned out too quickly, hadn't made it. Maybe that was Mike's fault, pushing him too hard. But that wasn't any cause for murder.

Fay Larkin? She might have been peeved at the way Diamond talked, calling her a "doll" and "babe". She'd seemed to resent Mike's possessive attitude, too. But certainly not enough to beat out the promoter's brains with a poker.

Old Bob Gray? He was a friendly old fellow, content as the gym's handyman. Sure, he had a small peeve at the pudgy promoter for the pushing around he got, but most gym menials always seem to have some sort of a peeve about something.

That left only Eddie Martin. He knew he hadn't done it. He had no cause to kill the promoter. But would the cops look at it that way? Sure, he'd hit Diamond knocked him down, when the promoter had pushed Roddell. It made him mad to see his manager treated like that just because Roddell had tried to smooth things over. Hell, the girl had smiled back at him, hadn't she? All he'd done was stop punching the bag and walk over to speak to her. She was a pretty little thing, with her long yellow hair and big blue eyes. Then the fat promoter had bounced over, his beady black eyes glinting with hate.

They'd had words, angry words, Eddie and Mike. Then when Roddell tried to smooth things over, Mike had turned on the old man, gave him

a shove and the old man fell down. Then Eddie saw red and waded into the fat promoter, gave him a left hook and a right cross, and Diamond went down for the count. Eddie hadn't wanted to kill the guy. Just wanted to teach him a lesson, to punish him for treating Roddell like that.

Then he'd turned to the girl and apologized. She was a good sport, told him to forget it, that Diamond had it coming to him. Diamond had revived enough to sit up on the floor and curse, to tell Eddie Martin he was through, to get out of town, that he'd blackball him from coast to coast. That's what the police would grab at. That's what they'd call a motive for murder. And he'd told Diamond he'd pick up his contract tonight. They'd know he'd been at Mike's apartment.

Eddie gave it up and went to bed.

IT WAS the heavy pounding on his door the next morning that snapped him awake. For a moment he lay blinking in the sunlight streaming through the window, trying to remember.

"C'mon in," he called, thinking it was probably Jim Henry. "The door's unlocked."

The door swung wide and a heavy-set man in a blue serge suit stepped into the room. From the tip of his wide heavy shoes to the cold had look in his eyes, "copper" was written all over him.

"You Eddie Martin, the boxer?" the man asked flatly.

"Yeah. Are you?" Eddie sat up on the side of the bed and yawned, then smiled.

"Wilson. Inspector, Homicide. Know why I'm here?"

He was a big man, beefy, in his early forties. He took off his black felt hat, placed it on the center table, and sat down in a chair. His sandy brown hair bushed out over his ears, but the top of his head was a gleaming bald spot, well polished by the palm of his hand brushing over it. His light blue eyes regarded Eddie keenly and his lips, not too full, twisted into a crooked grin. His

small straight nose hovered over a close-cropped mustache the same shade of sand as his hair.

"Why, no." Eddie shook his head. "Should I? Um-m, Homicide. But no, it couldn't be—"

"Couldn't be—let's say—murder?"

"Murder? Eddie let his face look shocked. "What murder?"

"Let me tell you about it," the inspector said slowly, taking the cigar from his mouth and carelessly dropping the ash on the floor. It's a very simple case, open and shut, as I see it. Yesterday you had a fight with Mike Diamond over some frill hanging out in the gym. You hit him, knocked him down. He said —"

"Not over the girl," Eddie cut in. "That wasn't what I hit him for. I hit him because he shoved old Roddell, made him fall down. That's what made me mad, treating an old man like that. Then when Roddell tried to smooth things over, Mike knocked him down. That's what—"

"He said he'd blackball you in this town and in every fight town from coast to coast," the inspector went on. "You got sore and said you'd bash in his brains." The big man paused to let his words soak in.

"So last night," he went on, "you went over to Diamond's apartment, either to pick up your contract or to remonstrate with him. You got into another fight, found your fists weren't enough, so you grabbed up the poker and let him have it."

"But I didn't do it," Eddie said flatly. "I didn't—"

"Sure, I know. C'mon, anyway. The chief wants to talk with you. Your girl friend and your sparring partner, Jim Henry, will both be there, too. Maybe they'll confess to it. Maybe. C'mon, get dressed and let's go."

Eddie eyed the big man speculatively, then rose and slowly dressed. The inspector nodded toward the door, and they stepped through and turned down the hallway.

HE WATCHED the big man lumber about the small room. He felt a urge of uncertainty, expecting the inspector to pause at the battered desk and pull out a rubber hose. Wil-

son stopped in front of him, and Eddie Martin slumped into a chair, pulled in his feet to keep them from being stepped on. The fighter's eyes shifted warily and he set himself to duck the huge fist that might be heading his way.

"C'mon, Eddie, let's have it," the inspector said. "Why did you kill him?"

"I've told you a thousand times. I didn't do it."

"This is murder, kid. You can't beat it. Too many people heard you, saw your fight with Diamond in the gym. You were seen coming out of his apartment. You haven't got a chance to beat this rap. Make it easy on yourself, and come clean."

Eddie Martin said nothing. There was nothing more he could say. All morning he'd gone over it, over and over again, giving the inspector all he knew. Rubber hose or no rubber hose, they couldn't make him admit something he didn't do. Yet—

Wilson's eyes smoldered under a deep scowl, and he pounded his big fist into the palm of the other hand.

"Okay," he growled, "if you won't talk, you won't talk. We'll see what the girl friend has to say."

He turned away and lurched out of the room.

The door slammed behind him with a bang that shook the cheap pictures on the wall. Eddie watched him go with a piece of ice gripping the base of his spine. Obviously, Wilson had left him to "sweat it out." Yet there was nothing to sweat out. But the thought that there was enough circumstantial evidence to actually pin the rap on him seared his brain like a redhot poker. Sure, he'd said he'd bash in the promoter's brains. But hell, he'd said the same thing about almost every man he fought. "Why, I'll kill that bum!" was the stock phrase of practically every fighter when asked the outcome of a bout. But try to make the cops believe it. He'd made that statement, and it was enough to hang him. But *who* could have killed the promoter?

His only chance was to find the actual killer.

The door opened and Wilson

stepped into the room. His face was red with anger, and his jaws worked as though he had a mouthful of rusty nails.

"Okay, Martin," the inspector growled. "Jim Henry and Fay Larkin alibi for you. They say you were doing road work around the lake between seven and nine, then went to dinner. They say they were with you all evening until you went home to bed. It's an alibi, but it's fishy. All right, you can go. But get this, and get it straight. Try to leave town and you'll be brought back in a pine box. If you think you can beat this killing with a lulu like that, you're punchier than you think. Now beat it."

Eddie beat it.

HE SLIPPED the desk clerk a ten spot and the man fitted a key into the lock and opened the door. The clerk left, and for the second time in as many nights, Eddie Martin stepped into Mike Diamond's apartment. He pushed the clip of a tiny pen-cell flash-light and a narrow beam spotted the carpeted floor. With the exception of the removal of the body and the poker, the room had been left untouched. None of the furniture had been straightened, nothing put back in place. With no idea of what he would seek or find, Eddie guided the tiny beam around the dark room. Yet, with himself as the only suspect, it might be possible that the police had overlooked some definite clue to the identity of the real killer.

It was then he sensed the presence of someone behind him, heard the startled half-frightened in-take of breath. He tried to spin around, only to have a million flashbulbs boom before him; then a hollow black void reached into his brain. It was instinctive reflex action that tried to bring up his guard, to dance away from a right cross. His feet fumbled uncertainly for a stance, didn't find it, and the floor jumped up and smacked him full in the face.

He shot off into space, plunged suddenly into emptiness.

The last thing he could remember, he thought he heard the outer door of the apartment close with a little slam. It was like a curtain coming down on the stage, with the footlights turned out suddenly, leaving only blackness and silence. . . .

Eddie Martin stirred slowly, tried vainly to pick up the referee's count. Instinctively he turned to a corner, expecting to hear Harry Roddell yell, "Take nine! Take nine!" Expecting to hear the crowd clamor, "Moider da bum!" But Roddell wasn't there and it seemed strangely dark, and the roar of the crowd was missing. The feel of the canvas was peculiarly soft and fuzzy.

Suddenly memory came back to him.

He struggled to nands and knees, tried to get up and fell over on his side. He tried again, swayed alittle, then crawled to the davenport and pulled himself to his feet. He weaved there for a moment until his head cleared a little. Funny, his thoughts turned to Fay Larkin; he had to see her.

Somehow, he stumbled out of the room, down the stairs to the lobby and into a phone booth. He dialed her number and thrilled to her voice as she answered his ring.

"Fay? Look, honey. I've got see you. . . . Yes, it's important. . . . No, I'll be at the Pekin Low. I think chow mein is just the ticket for what I need. . . . Okay, see you in half an hour."

While he waited for Fay, Eddie Martin ordered the chow meins and tried to piece together the jig-saw puzzle that whirled before him in the last two days. That frightened sigh before he was knocked cut confused him. Could it have been Mike Diamond's killer? Yet, if it were, why didn't the killer finish him off? Certainly the vase with which he'd been struck was heavy enough to smash his skull, if there'd been weight enough behind it. And why a frightened sigh? Who would be, or could be, mixed with fear before using a weapon *that could* cause death? A man would surely have the weight and a lack of fear—but then, it couldn't have been

a woman. Why would a woman want to bash Eddie Martin over the head? What woman? There was just one. But no, he couldn't bring himself to believe Fay Larkin was the type.

But again, how did he know?

The jig-saw fell apart as he saw Fay push through the swinging doors and enter the restaurant. Her big blue eyes, wide-set and surrounded by creamy well-cared-for skin, were alight with eagerness. Her soft red lips opened into a smile as enchanting and natural as the face that beamed down upon him. She gave her head a little toss and the corn-yellow hair fell back from her face, to cascade to her shoulders.

She was followed by Jim Henry.

EDDIE MARTIN felt a surge of relief roll over him as he saw his sparring partner. Friends. Right now, he needed friends. If only they could help him. But how could they help except listen while he unburdened his mind into their willing ears? He looked at Fay, and all doubts vanished from his mind.

The three friends slipped into a booth.

"I met Jim outside my apartment," Fay told him. Her voice was shaky and she was visibly agitated. "I thought you might like to see him, so I invited him along."

Jim Henry was very much like Eddie Martin, same height and build. His hair was coarse and straight and black as tar, with black eyes, diamond bright, set back into deep sockets. His nose had been broken in some past ring-bout, and reset a little off-center, to give his face a slightly twisted whimsical look. His lips were a thin red line across the top of a well-molded chin. He was dressed in a light gray suit with a tiny blue stripe, and his shoes were a two-tone tan.

"Sure, glad you did," Eddie nodded. "I've just got to talk to someone. This thing's got me screwy. Why—I hope you'll forgive me for it—tonight, when I got socked on the head, I thought you did it. Funny,

isn't it?"

Fay stiffened, and the color drained from her cheeks. She reached for a glass of water and gulped it down. The thing that caught Eddie's attention was the sudden pallor that underlay her oval small-featured face; the tautness that suddenly stiffened her slim body, and eyes that were as vibrant to some inner panic as a throbbing violin string.

"Were—were you in Diamond's apartment earlier this evening?" she asked, voice husky with strain. "Was it you that—"

"Then you were there! It was you—"

"But, Eddie, believe me—I didn't know it was you. You know, of course, I was with Diamond the night before—dinner, you know. I left my lipstick there. I was afraid if the police found it—you know how police are. Someone came in; I was afraid it might be the murderer. I had to get out before he saw me, so—"

"So you beamed me on the head with the vase," Eddie's tone was cold and emphatic. Funny how a guy'd fall for a pretty face—and he'd believe anything she wanted him to believe.

"Well, quit worrying about it," Jim Henry broke in. "You're lucky, at that. You got beamed just once. It took three like that to do Mike in."

The conversation languished. The Chinese waiter pushed two chow meins across the table and silently took Henry's additional order, then left.

"It seems to me this case is full of suspects," Jim Henry said. "So far as a motive is concerned, any one of us could have done it. Roddell was sore because Mike pushed him on his fanny; Bob Gray never liked Diamond because of the pushing around he got at the gym. Why, he suggested that you push his face in, remember? Fay could have done it because of the things he called her in training quarters, and you, because he refused to return your contracts. You could

have gotten into a fight with him last night and—"

"And you?" Fay Larkin asked, her voice a little testy. "You could have killed him because—"

"Because why? Well yes, I suppose I could have done it, too. I never particularly liked Mike, but if that's a motive, then I'm a suspect, too." He laughed jerkily, and the others joined him, but without mirth.

"Thi's bickering won't get us anywhere," Eddie said. "The thing to do is to get that lipstick before the police find it and tie you into this.

"Know where you left it?"

"Certainly, where every girl leaves a lipstick—before a mirror. The only one Mike had there, outside of his bedroom, is on the medicine cabinet. I left it there."

"There is just one thing I don't get," Eddie said. "Fay, what was a nice girl like you doing running around with a guy like Mike?"

Fay Larkin let a tinkle of laughter escape, and her eyes lighted with humor. She opened her purse, fished around a bit, then handed the fighter a small card. Eddie took it and read it, and whistle puckered his lips.

"Fay Larkin, Special Investigator of the State Athletic Commission!" he exclaimed. "but why?"

"You probably dont know it, but Diamond was pulling some pretty shady deals in his promotions. Evidence was lacking. But knowing his weakness for a pretty face and figure the Boxing Commission assigned me to gather evidence against him."

"Oh," Eddie Martin said simply.

"So you see, I never really cared for Diamond," Fay Larkin assured the fighter with a soul warming smile.

"Could be a motive for murder," Jim Henry broke in, with a laugh. Then as an after-thought: "Say, why don't you have a talk with Bob Gray? He might give you a good lead on this thing."

as a detective, he was a first rate fighter. The more he tried to get at the bottom of things, the more the truth eluded him. His face was set in deep thought, then he shrugged his shoulders indifferently. Why not have a talk with Bob Gray? If no good was achieved, certainly no harm could be done. He rose, paid the check, and the three of thm walked out of the restaurant.

Jim Henry turned to go down the street.

Eddie and Fay watched him as he turned the corner and didn't look back. Eddie hailed a cab and gave the driver Gray's address. It was in the poorer section of town, situated on the south side of Tenth Street.

"Doesn't look like too good a place, does it?" he said to the girl. "Guess Bob isn't doing so well."

He climbed the rickety stairs to Bob Gray's room, and became depressed at the squalor of the cheap rooming house. With every step, he felt that the staircase might tumble him into oblivion. He found the room and knocked softly on the door. No answer; he tried the knob, and the door swung open. He stepped aside to let the girl precede him.

Then Fay screamed.

Eddie quickly cupped a hand over her mouth, pulled her back and stepped through the door ahead of her. Then he saw the old man.

He was lying face down on an old iron bed, the tattered quilt partially pulled away from the blankets. Bob Gray would answer no more knocks on his door. His thin gray hair, usually combed neatly, was matted with a dull rusty-colored stain. Except for the cold stony stare in his eyes, the old man might have been just lying there, resting. An ugly looking hole beneath the right ear and a cheap looking .32 automatic, partially covered by the dirty rug on the floor, mutely told how the gym handyman gave up his hold on life.

"Let's get out of here," Eddie said.

"Now we've got to get that lipstick—and get it fast."

EDDIE MARTIN said nothing. Talk would get him no place.

Fay was sobbing, but it was no detriment to her speed as she followed the welterweight down the stairs and out into the street. She was out of breath and weak as they hit through the door of the waiting cab. She sat back into the cushions and her sobbing took on an hysterical pitch.

"Eddie, who—who—"

"I don't know," Eddie said flatly. "But after we get that lipstick, I'm going to find out. These things are beginning to add up."

By the time Fay Larkin and Eddie Martin reached Diamond's apartment, the girl had regained her composure. Her face was tear-stained and the look of horror still haunted her eyes. Eddie took her hand and patted it encouragingly.

HE PUSHED the door open; there would be no one here to answer a knock. If no one had been here since he left earlier in the evening, the door should still be open. If it were locked, a ring would do no good, anyway.

Fay followed him in, then screamed suddenly. That much he knew before the side of his head seemed to be torn apart. He staggered clear across the room, collided with a chair, then crashed to the floor. As he hit the carpet, a body hurled upon him, throwing punches faster than ever came his way before. He put his arms over his face, rolled, then grabbed the figure upon him. Together they threshed about the floor, each trying to gain his feet. They rose together, and for the first time Eddie could see the figure of a man dimly silhouetted by the moonlight filtering through the curtains into the dark room.

The figure rushed, and Eddie backed away, jabbing for the face. A right caught him flush on the jaw and Eddie Martin crashed into the wall. The man moved in and clinched. Eddie pushed him away, swung to the jaw with a left hook and followed it with a right cross. Very few men remained on their feet after a blow like that, and this man was no excep-

tion. His feet seemed to fly from under him and he slammed to the floor.

The room burst into light, Eddie whirled. Inspector Wilson stood by the light switch, an ugly looking service revolver clutched in his right hand.

"Reach!" he said coldly. "Make one funny move, and they'll haul you out of here in a paper bag."

"Don't worry," Eddie agreed. "I'm staying put."

Fay Larkin was huddled in an over-stuffed chair, tearing nervously at a flimsy handkerchief. Eddie walked over to her, sank into the chair at her side and took her in his arms. She rested her head on his shoulder and sobbed gently.

"Makes a nice picture," Wilson said sarcastically. "But you can forget your little domestics. This time you're staying in the clink. For good."

"How'd you know I'd be here?" Eddie asked.

"Hell," I've had a tail on you ever since I kicked you out of the police station. Why d'you think I turned you loose? I know every move you've made, know every place you've been."

"Then you know that—"

"That Bob Gray got the works? Yeah. I know about that, too."

"I suppose you'll try to pin that on me, huh?"

"No, not that one." Wilson shook his head. "As I said, I had you followed every minute. We saw you coming like a bat out of hell from Gray's room, so we went up to take a look. We found him with a bullet in his head. You weren't there more than five minutes; Gray's been dead five hours. Your tail is your alibi for that one; it's this one I'm worried about. Tell me, why did you go to Gray's room?"

EDDIE STARED at the inspector a moment, then jumped to his feet, almost spilling the girl to the floor.

"That's it!" he said. "That's the answer. Just why did I go to Bob Gray's room?"

"I'll ask the question," the big inspector said. "You answer them."

"Okay, but keep your eye on the guy on the floor. He's trying to get up now. Keep him quiet, and I'll give you the answers. It's as clear as two and two when you hit the right combination. And you gave me the key when you asked me why I went to Gray's room."

The man on the floor pulled himself to his feet, swayed unsteadily a moment. Eddie held his arm, then helped him to a chair. Wilson took a guarding position in front of him.

"Take it easy, Jim Henry," the inspector said.

"Yes, I want you to hear this," Eddie said, "and bear me out in a few facts."

Henry leaned back into the chair, shaking the cobwebs from his befuddled brain. Eddie took a cigarette from his pocket, lit it, took a few hasty drags, then faced the group.

"The tip-off came in Pekin Low's chop suey joint," he said slowly, as if choosing his words. "It was there that facts began to make sense. Fay, do you remember what you told me about coming back here to Diamond's apartment?"

Fay jumped to her feet, startled. Her color was gone, leaving her face a pasty white, and the rims of her lips were a bleached sickly brown. She closed her eyes, as if to shut out some repulsive nerve-wracking scene. For a moment she stood straight, then slumped back into her chair, her backbone rigid. Her voice had a husky distortion when she spoke.

"Why, yes," she said, and opened her eyes. "I told you I left my lipstick there."

"Right," Eddie nodded. "You said you left it in the medicine cabinet. Will you see if it is still there, please?"

Fay went into the bathroom, and in a moment came back.

"It—it's gone," she said. "It's not there now." Her eyes were frightened and her lip trembled.

"Now," Eddie Martin said, and

turned to the big inspector. "Did you or any of your assistants know anything about a lipstick being left here?"

"Lipstick!" Wilson shook his bushy head. "No, we don't know anything about any lipstick."

"Now, how many times was Diamond hit with the poker?"

"Three times," Wilson answered. "Why?"

"Who knew about that?" Eddie asked. "Anybody outside the police know whether Diamond was hit once or a dozen times?"

"No. We purposely withheld that bit of information until we could definitely pin the killing on the man that did it. No one except the police knew how Diamond was killed."

"Then no one else could know except the killer. Right?"

"Go on," Wilson said. "You're calling the shots."

"All right. In the restaurant no one knew about the lipstick except Fay Larkin—no one, until she told Jim Henry and myself. Then I told Fay about being hit on the head with a vase. Jim Henry said I was lucky to get only one blow; that it took three like that to do for Mike Diamond. How would he know? The lipstick is gone; who could have taken that, when only the three of us knew of its existence, that it had been left here in the cabinet? Fay and I have been together every minute since we left the restaurant, and neither of us got it. Just before we left the restaurant, Jim Henry suggested that I go see Bob Gray about Diamond's killing. Why? So he could have time to get that lipstick, I'll bet."

"Why?" Fay Larkin asked. "For the simplest reason in the world. He wanted us to be seen in Bob Gray's room; he knew we'd be linked with his killing."

"Knew you'd be linked with that killing? Horse feathers! Why, he is your best alibi," Wilson disagreed. "He said he was with you while you were doing road work."

"Sure," Eddie nodded. "But there was one chance in a million that he might be linked with Diamond's killing, and by alibiing me, he furnished

an alibi for himself. He refused to go with us to Gray's room. Why? Simply because he wanted a chance to get that lipstick. But for the life of me I can't understand why. Search him. If he has it on him, it will tie in with what the boy says."

JIM HENRY rose sullenly, face dark with hatred. Suddenly he dashed for the door. Eddie spilled him with a stiff right cross. Inspector Wilson quickly ran his hands through the fallen man's pockets.

"This it?" he asked, straightening up.

"My lipstick," Fay Larkin nodded. The inspector jerked Henry to his feet and pushed him into a chair.

"All right, talk," he said.

Jim Henry's lips curved into a sneer, then like a balloon with a pin thrust into it, all the fight left him.

"Okay," he said. "I guess you'll get it out of me anyway. You might as well have it now. I'm glad I killed the old buzzard. Read my clippings, and you'll see I was the best welter-weight on the Pacific Coast. It was predicted that I would some day be champ. Mike Diamond was my manager then, before he became a promoter. He cheated me out of my earnings, told me I was getting half of what was actually paid for the fights. He was money hungry and he pushed me too fast, put me up against good boys with twice the experience. Two or three bad body beatings and a couple of knockouts, and I was through. I didn't have what it took any more."

He paused, then nodded toward Eddie Martin, and a look of hatred crept over his face and was gone as suddenly as it came.

"Then Eddie Martin came along," he went on. "I worked with him when he first started. His style was similar to mine. I admired his speed, his

punch, his cleverness, then began to hate him for it. His success should have been my success, his style was my style, his glory was the glory I should have had—if I'd been taken along as carefully. When he had that fight in the gym with Mike Diamond and he said he would bash in Mike's head; it was my chance to get them both with one shot. I'd kill Mike and Martin would get the works for it. I didn't figure on Fay getting into it, but when she told us about the lipstick, I thought I'd plant it somewhere else where it would be found. Martin even spoiled my chances with her, but if I couldn't have her, neither would he."

"How awful!" Fay moaned. "I never knew he ever so much as gave me a second thought."

"No one did," Jim Henry said. "While you were going around with Diamond, I kept it to myself. But when I saw Martin moving in, I saw red."

"What about old Bob Gray? Why did you kill him?" Wilson wanted to know.

"That was an accident. I had some blood on my hands, and I went back to the gym to wash it off—I didn't see if till I was out on the street. Gray saw the blood, and I was afraid he'd figure things out and talk when he saw Martin taking the rap for it. I hated to do it, but I *had* to kill him."

Fay Larkin ran to Eddie Martin and threw her arms around him, nestled her head on his shoulder.

"Oh, Eddie! I thought you did it," she moaned.

"And I thought—well, it doesn't make any difference now," Eddie said, and put his arms around her, drew her close.

That was one clinch Eddie Martin never wanted to break.

A TICKET, A CASKET

By R. S. KALLER

*If you don't know the answer to a problem in crime, look it up
in the encyclopedia. . . .*



The room sounded like a atom bomb went off!

WHACK! AND I start falling on my face for the third time in less than a week.

Walking to a parking lot on Madison and Thirty-eighth ought to be a peaceful jaunt, but this guy is persistent and accurate. Before the fog

clears, he has my notebook, rips out all of the written pages and starts sauntering off. Only this time I have a fibre cushion built into my snap brim, and a hand-tailored derringer up my left sleeve, which I promptly use. I only pink the lout, though—I still can't see straight.

PARI-MUTUEL? NO, A ONE-WAY TICKET TO DEATH! Ace Novelet

Whack number one had been excusable. It was the second clout that burned me. This same character had slapped me nonchalantly with his search-light, putting me away again. I had had too much pushing around. But here I was again! Apparently, my notes made hot reading for someone.

It all started when Sewell of the Charles Indemnity Company called me in to work on a racetrack loss. It had been a normal, quiet day at the office, and I was figuring what I would bid on a 1715, handblown, Colonial Whiskey Flask when Jean announced him over the interoffice box.

Since Sewell had never been in the office of "Larry Phillips, Insurance Investigator and Adjuster" since it opened, I smelled a headache. Sewell is tall, portly, partly bald and given to pulling on his lower lip when he's thinking. He slides his hand-tailored pants onto my best chair, clips the end off a cigar and leans back. I note the three keys dangling on his watch chain and the dime-sized solitaire on his lift pinky. This is my biggest account.

He's direct for a change. It seems that Le Bouille, of "Lonigan, Le Bouille and Clarke, Brokers," talked him into insuring the new Malville Racetrack for all risks, and it had been a profitable deal for two years. Only lately, some joker had figured an angle, and the track is losing between three and five thousand a day in over payments on winning tickets. I look somewhat puzzled at the brief explanation and Sewell gets down to details.

"Since last Wednesday, there has been an inexplicable repetition of losses. Several times the number of winning tickets has exceeded the number sold." He accents the word number each time by tapping the arm of his chair with his index finger. I put my elbows on the desk and lean forward, intent. Sewell goes on.

"The amount of money lost to date is in excess of thirty-five thousand dollars." Business of flicking the ash off his cigar into an ash tray.

"I'd like you to see Clay at the

track, and endeavour to rectify this situation." With this I get a quick glance, questioning.

"What's been found out so far?" I ask, scribbling the date on my memorandum pad.

"We've used the regular adjuster, The Nassau County Police, and the Pinkerton Service available at the track with no results."

We both sit silent a moment. Then I let it drop, gently.

"What fee would you consider reasonable for this job?" The slug here should be strong.

Sewell shrugs grimly.

"Buy action," is the reply, and he drops twenty, one-hundred dollar bills on my desk. He looks a little tired. Whether from worry or too much night life, I can't tell.

Ignoring the vulgar display of wealth, I open the door of my pint-sized bar in back of me, and set out scotch and bourbon, ice, soda and glasses. After gulping half his drink, Sewell leans back again in his chair.

"Ted Clay should be free about four this afternoon, and I'd like you to interview him."

I nod acquiescence. He has me talking that way.

Sewell finishes his drink, pats his mouth with a square yard of cambric and hauls himself erect. He reaches for his panama which is dangling on a hook, and observes reflectively in parting: "A maximum of caution is indicated."

As if I didn't know.

Scrunched back in my chair, I am not so chipper. The fact that the Charles Indemnity company, a notoriously stiff-necked bunch has let Sewell call in an outsider means that they're definitely up against it. I sigh. Oh, well, that's my business.

GLANCING OVER THE edge of my office partition, I can see another headache. When I was deactivated, and released from the C.I.C. in Italy on a medical discharge, my only thought had been to establish an office. Consequently, when "Uncle Looney" Brown, M.D., F.A.C.P.,

recommended young Jean Hamilton as a secretary, I hired her eagerly. Only now she is two years older (twenty one), and a problem. His specifications still held: She's calm, efficient adept at office routines—but she's also a beautiful, scrubbed example of American womanhood—and despite the conservative clothes, a glance is enough to note her well-developed personality. From the song of the same name. This would still all add up to nothing, except that lately she's been getting ideas.

I saunter out and peer over her shoulder. Jean is typing the total of a bill for some of last weeks' work. She rips it out of her machine, puts the original under the letter of enclosure, shuffles the carbons and uses the stapling machine.

Suddenly conscious of my presence, Jean jumps up nervously (hmmm—she never used to be nervous.) and almost falls against the typewriter from the violence of motion. I snake out an arm and break her fall, pulling her to me to steady her.

Jean makes no attempt to move. Her blue eyes just look straight into mine with an expression which I tell myself I don't recognize. Only I do.

My arm is around her waist, her body is warm against mine, her lips are parted and three inches away. I'm human. Much later I finally remember where we are and pull back.

"Now look," I admonish, "We will go into this some other time. Right now I have work to do." As an answer, she leans forward and kisses me again. Strictly a woman of action. I kiss her back.

About ten minutes later I take command and dump her on our "guest" chair.

"I'm going to the Melville track," I state.

"Take me with you." I note the use of the imperative. She must be inexperienced or she'd never talk that way to an old bachelor.

"I'm on business."

"You need a secretary with you."

"No."

"Yes!"

So we close the office, and she nestles against my arm as we head for the Williams Street Parking Lot. You can see what I mean by noting this as a problem.

At the track, all is traditional. They even have the burgler to announce the beginning of each race. The large black-faced tote board periodically registers the changing odds, and there is the usual scurrying of last minute betters. The mob breathes money. In any one square yard you can spot Sulka ties and flashy rings by the dozen. We plow through the field up to the boxes and have Clay paged. As expected, he's in the box, and after I park Jean, he and I take off for an inspection of the premises.

Long lines are queued at each betting window. There seems to be as many suckers betting \$50.00 as there are \$2.00, but the longest line is at the \$10.00 windows. At each barred opening, a clerk is busy punching keys on an oversized cash register that chomps out tickets.

Walking around behind the scenes, we take time to look over the tellers' shoulders. One towheaded, six-foot character intrigues me. He's wearing dull clothes, and a beautiful "Charles Nicolet" chronograph. I must have stared too long, because his quick glance is hostile.

CLAY HAS QUARTER to three feet and a wheeze like an old plow horse. At five minute intervals he wipes bubbles of perspiration from his face, but I don't quit until I've seen the whole layout. When we return to his private office, he's panting, so he presses a button and a waiter appears with scotch and soda. Three drinks later, Clay is talkative, and it seems that the losses have him worried. They have found no means of indentifying the extra tickets, and even a change in the tri-colored paper has been of no avail. It makes him look like a chump.

I learn that the track opens and closes late. So leaving Clay to work on

the scotch, I pick up Jean and depart.

On the way home, to her house, we get into an argument.

"Look baby," I persist, "This business is dangerous and it's no place for a nice girl."

"I'm not a nice girl." She's going to be difficult.

"Don't hand me that!" She looks at me reflectively and grins.

Having finished the Lana Turner act, she now does the Rosalind Russell.

"A woman should be of assistance to her husband."

I must look grim, because I feel grim. The next words are understandable English.

"I haven't proposed to anyone yet."

Jean inches nearer the door, and when I drop her at her house, the chill is on. Which is O.K. with me.

The walk between the tall hedges in front of her house is shadowy only we don't stop to smooch. As the door shuts behind her and I walk back, a hedge stirs. Before I can turn I am sapped—cold.

This is the first of the sluggers I mentioned. When I come to I am resting peacefully on my back with my hands crossed on my chest—the rat has a sense of humor. Nothing is touched except my notebook—that's gone.

Back at my apartment, I take a long shower and note that my scars get less lived every time. While the soup is bubbling, I drain some beer and find the paper house mentioned by Clay as his supplier, listed in the red-book.

Eight o'clock finds me sliding down a knotted tow-rope from the sky-light into the paper warehouse on Varick Street. I land on top of a stack of flats and stretch out prone. There is a strong light on the side exit, and about 8:30 comes a tap at this door. The nightwatchman appears suddenly, and the door opens. I am not surprised to see towhead with the "Nicolet" chronograph. As I watch, they got to a stack of paper rolls, remove a small bundle and head toward the door, talking.

"Are you sure that's the right co-

lor combination?" asks the watchman. He's a little querulous and loves to talk. It must be the monotony. They're all like that.

"Yeah, yeah. Green with a pink middle." The chronograph is impatient. Must have a date.

"I'm always afraid of a mistake." He's anxious to please, this nice, old watchman—the double dealing skunk.

"Ah, quit worrying. It's my headache."

The chronograph kid slips three bills out of his wallet and hands them to the watchman.

"Here, this'll square up for the week. See you tomorrow."

I DON'T LISTEN for any more, but skin up my string of knots, close the skylight and scoot down the fire escape. My quarry is slow starting, so I pull ahead to the next corner, stop, and then I'm in motion when he passes.

He heads for the West Side express highway. On Des Brosses Street, all is quiet so I decide to act, and crowd him to the curb, sounding my slightly illegal siren.

I let him look at the derringer, the blue steel glittering wickedly in the reflected light, and I get him seated in my car, throw him a pair of cuffs, and make him put them on his wrists in a crouching position with his hands under his legs. This way he has to be a contortionist to be comfortable and able to swing. I go back for the bundle and we take off.

I know Boni and Crosby will be taking squeals at this time, so I head for the Charles Street Police Station. When my guest sees we pull up in front of the green lights he speaks for the first time. "What's the pinch for? I ain't done nothing!"

For an answer I slip "snubby" out of the holster under my right arm and massage him lightly. Maybe he wasn't the guy who slugged me earlier—or then again maybe he was. Satisfied that he's asleep, I go in to get my "assistants".

Some of the boys are parked

around a desk, swapping lies about their ability as handicappers, but when Boni and Crosby spot me reading the bulletin board, I get a fast nod.

My assistants Joe Bonilotti and Fritz Crosby are the two hottest cops in New York. They're almost the same size and weight, but they look inches and pounds different. Boni was on the Lacrosse Team with me at Columbia, and could have been an All-American halfback and an inter-collegiate light-heavy champ if he hadn't neglected studies and sports to chase after show girls, debutantes, and anything in a well-filled sweater.

Bonilotti Sr., L.L.D., finally clamped down when Joe smacked up his second car in a month. I was surprised when he went on the cops, but glad even if it did interfere with my studying Italian dialects, which were his meat. We had renewed our friendship in Naples, where he was a captain in the M.P.'s, and my business kept us together after the war.

Crosby, who was a little older, had been sidetracked into teaching forms of personal mayhem to rookie cops during the Great Unpleasantness. He always looks a little sloppy and sleepy. It's his photographic memory that amazes me, however. That and his unwillingness to talk.

This last is a fortunate failing for the team, because Boni is definitely the extrovert type. He can reel off stories about the racetracks, gambling, theater and nightclub crowds by the hour—and does. Crosby usually just sits and listens or reads the translated Japanese Manual on the art of ju-jitsu (as annotated by Crosby).

Downstairs, I find them standing at the curb waiting. We all get in my car and I explain: "This is a banana I want peeled. He knows something I don't and that makes me lonesome. I'd like to share his thoughts. I feel chummy."

Then I hand them each a C-note.

Boni sticks the money in his hat band and says, "Let's go to 'Vendom Trois', without looking at Crosby.

The "Vendome Trois" is a high-

class gambling joint that hises behind a parlor-floor and basement exterior in the East 40's, and as long as they play ball, they are allowed to keep operating.

WHEN WE PULL up in front of the joint, I slip off the cuffs, and Boni and Crosby pick up the character, a hand under each armpit, and drag him to the door. The doorman is big and ugly, but he quickly steps aside and we push in.

"Where's fancy-pants?" asks Boni.

Muscle-face, the cigar-store indian inside, never bats an eye in our direction. He keeps looking out the peephole—but a word leaks out:

"Upstairs."

"Anyone in the room?" Boni presses.

The sphinx changes his position and looks as if he just had an attack of diarrhea. But he plays ball.

"No. Here's the key."

We get in the mirror-lined elevator and go to the top. Number 6 is small, soundproof and contains two chairs and a desk. I'm outside. They drop the ticket-puncher on the floor and close the door. Boni pops the door open again.

"What was it you wanted to know, Larry?"

It's a reasonable question.

"Just who his boss is—the General too, no Second Looies' names."

"O.K., go down to the second floor and play the quarter machine wedged in the corner. It's for visiting firemen."

He gaily shuts the door.

Downstairs there's only about fifty people playing the usual games. It's early yet.

Boni's right about the one-armed bandit. I clip it for about forty fish and wander over for a drink at the sideboard stacked with hors d'oeuvres, bottles and set-ups.

Everyone is very nice to me—the floor manager even offers me one of his imported cigarillos while discussing the Dodgers and the weather. It is quite obvious that everyone know who I came in with. However, I don't have long to wait. Muscle-

face, the doorman, himself comes back to give me the nod.

At my knock on the door, Boni opens it, and there is our towhead Rover Boy in a very docile condition. His face is red and puffy and his breath comes in sobs. But there are no visible marks on him. The boys are good at this.

"He's just a messenger boy", Boni says in a disgusted tone, filling his nails, "And he don't know but one name—Bolkin."

"Yeah," says Crosby.

The messenger spits some blood into the waste-basket and says nothing.

"What do you want to do with it?" Boni inquires.

"Can he be held for a couple of days?" I ask Crosby.

Fritz turns the mental movie on and I can practically hear the penal code whirling past.

"Sure," he grunts, finally, "Section 3-B, sub-section 4, para. 6—(Frequenting a public gambling house)."

Even Boni laughs at that one.

I drop them off at the corner, slip the boys the forty I won on the machine as a tip, and take off for the track.

Clay has gone home, so I look for Bolkin.

He turns out to be Ex-Lieutenant George C. Bolkin, formerly of the Nassau County Detective Squad. I find him easing his bunions on a ox in one of the empty stalls. His attitude is very friendly. "What can I do for you?"

"I'm Larry Phillips," I start.

He doesn't look so friendly. I must remember to switch to Pepsodent.

"Oh, yes, you're the insurance investigator assigned to the current losses we're having." He hands me a cigarette and we light up. "I don't think there's an awful lot you can do out here," he muses reflectively. "This is entirely a police matter, and it's only a question of time before we find the answer."

"You mean days or years?" I flip, looking over his fat bulk and putty-white face. He ignores the crack, and

rubs his fist over his straggly mustache. "In fact," he continues, "I'm sure it would aid us if you kept away from the track—no sense alarming our quarry."

I wonder whether he was being sarcastic on that last.

"Besides, you might get hurt, and I feel responsible for this investigation." There's no mistaking the iron hand in the velvet glove now.

"I'll chance that." He's too damn smug.

Bolkin fingers his mustache again and shrugs, I've never liked guys with bristles since some wingman on Princeton's Lacross Team broke a stick over my skull.

I RETURN TO the clubhouse, now almost deserted, and try phoning Clay and Sewell. Both are out. At the bar, I find Jean busy working on a Pink Lady.

"What are you doing here?" I ask, burning.

"Visiting."

"Well, get to hell home, and stop visiting."

"I won't."

This is the wrong cue. I'm in no mood for fooling. I yank her off the stool, run her out to the car, and grind off fast. It is a grim ride to her house and I follow her in. This is going to be difficult, but I am still angry.

"Now look Jean. Stay away from the track while I'm working on this case. Not only are you of no help, but it's dangerous there. You're a secretary, not a private eye."

"Is that all?" she asks, rising.

"Yes."

"Well, goodnight." And she starts up the stairs, her back straight. She has got beautiful legs.

It is now almost one, so I head home. After parking the car in the apartment garage, I walk to the door and all the world goes black. This is the sapping I mentioned before. When I begin to come to too soon, the lug who's sitting on my back like on an air-cushion and reading my notes like a novel, nonchalantly leans over and taps me with his flashlight—again curtains.

When I come to a second time, I'm not happy even though the Shadow is gone. The little strip of scotch tape I had stuck at the top of my door is broken. Groggy as I am, I go up on the roof and down the fire escape. The window is open, so I draw my gun and flash my pencil-flashlight—all untouched by my reading public—into the room. No one is there. When I put on the lights I'm really sore. I've had visitors. The chairs are ripped apart. Mirrors and pictures are smashed. The rug is slashed. In the bedroom everything is torn or smashed. A little panicky, I opened the closet. My double-locked cabinet is torn open and my collection of Colonial Whiskey flasks is a pile of shattered glass. That did it. I think I must have blacked out again from rage, only this time on my feet. When I am conscious of my action again I am half way to the track and doing eighty-five.

Ex-Lieutenant Bolkin I find just where I had left him. He starts to move as I entered the stall, and the crunch of the roscoe butt on his skull sounds so loud, for a minute I think maybe I've killed him. I am not too horror-struck by this idea either—only I haven't. His skull's too thick. This guy I'm handling myself, so I cart him up to my apartment.

In the bedroom, I spreadeagle him on the bare spring and lash him down. He's still out so I get some cold water in a pot and douse him. After the third drenching he comes to. I have all of his junk piled on the floor—gun, bullets, wallet, book, pen, pencil, watch, change, cigarettes, lighter and handkerchief. None of them yield any information.

I HAVE BEEN collecting beer mugs and Colonial Hand-blown Whiskey Flasks since I was ten. My uncle (guardian since I was four), indulged my whim, and provided me with reference books, catalogues and treatises on the subject so that by the time I reached Columbia University, my knowledge and experience in buying made me independent of his allowance. On return from Italy I

dumped all of my beer mugs—even the seven magnificent silver ones—at a nice even ten Thousand, and used the money to set up my office. But the prize flasks I refused to part with—even though Jaeckel had appraised them at twenty-six thousand and offered eighteen cash. They were insured on that appraisal under a "Fine Arts" policy with Sewell, but that still didn't make me happy. It's only money. The collection was my hobby, relaxation, pride and joy. To think that this white-faced rat had calmly ordered them smashed gave me the same feeling I'd gotten when we saw some hostages the Krauts had shot during their retreat to North Italy.

Seeing he was still groggy, I dumped some ammonia on a rag and held it under his flabby nose. It worked. Struggling, moving his head from side to side, Bolkin tried to escape the fumes. I threw the rag on the floor and started slapping him—backhand and forehand. When he starts swearing I slap him some more and he shuts off. For a full minute I just stand and look. Something in my face must have frightened him because his eyes began to grow panicky. Then I go into the bathroom and dig out the touniquet Uncle Looey gave me for "first aid". It is only a fine chain encased in a rubber hose with a handle, but it should be of aid in working on Bolkin. He whimpers a little.

"All right, fatty, start talking." Silence.

I work on him some more but just as I begin to think I'm making progress, the door bell rings.

Glancing through the peep-hole, I see Jean.

"Larry, are you all right? I tried to phone you to tell you I was sorry about being stubborn at the track and I couldn't get any answer. Then I really got worried. I had to come over."

I sigh. She is very sweet and it's nice to have someone with taffy hair and blue eyes worrying about you, but she sure picked a helluva fine time to drop in.

"I'm all right Jean. You'd better go

home before your folks get worried. Besides, I'm busy."

"At this hour?"

It's no use. She's going to come in by hook or by crook.

"All right," baby, I say grimly. "Don't say I didn't warn you not to try and play cops and robbers."

Bolkin had tried to move, but he's well lashed down.

"Where are the tickets printed?" I ask savagely.

He starts swearing again. It is obvious that I've got to get really tough to get any information from this character. I go back to the bathroom and return with a surgical dressing scissors and slit his coat and right shirt sleeve to the shoulder. Then I slip the tourniquet around his bicep and start cranking it up.

"Now look, stupid, this thing on your arm is a tourniquet. This thing on my wrist is a watch. When the watch ticks off twenty minutes, gangrene will begin to set in, and the butcher-boys will have to amputate," I tell him. "I'm not fooling either. You're going to tell me how and where the tickets are printed," I say slowly. "You're going to tell me your boss' name. We have the chronograph kid tucked away, and he's given us part of the story already. You be a good boy and give us the other portions and you'll get off easy. If not—"

I tightened the tourniquet until I felt no pulse under my fingertips and started counting the half minute intervals. At three minutes, his arm must have felt numb, because he starts sweating and struggling. I slap him across the nose, and look at the watch again.

At five minutes he wilted: "I'll talk." Sweat is trickling down his face and the putty white is green.

IT TURNS OUT that Bolkin is the handy-man. He picked up the tickets on the races to be hit and delivers them to a trailer parked on a nearby lot. Here the stolen paper is used to imitate the track issue, and within minutes after the finish, an assortment of passers are at the pay-off windows to collect. He described

the trailer and gave the license number, but even retightening the tourniquet for ten minutes can't drag his boss' name out of him. Disgusted, I go out to the kitchen for a drink of water.

Jean is not looking very happy. She is seated on the little chrome kitchen chair and stares accusingly as I enter. After a mouthful of water, I get on the phone and drag Boni out of bed.

"I got Bolkin." This is my first speech.

"Where?" Boni is quick on the uptake.

"In my apartment. Can you get Crosby and come up?"

"Is it urgent?" He must have a blonde around.

"Yeah."

"O.K."

While I'm waiting, I start piling the debris in a corner.

My insurance policy will cover the loss, but it is going to require years to replace the stuff, and the more I see the madder I get. Jean had been informed of the cause of the mess, but every time she passes Bolkin she looks accusing. In silence we pile junk.

Boni and Crosby knock briskly on the door shortly, and I let them in. They take everything in quick and Crosby goes over and parks his beam on the window sill off the fire escape. He doesn't like surprises—by other people.

"Who done it?", grunts Crosby, imitating a dumb cop.

"I think this is the fuse," I reply looking at Bolkin.

I outline my data to date, and Boni says, "We'll bury this guy for a while. Crosby'll think of something on the way over." He looks thoughtful. "Only, Larry," he says softly, "you'd better get all the answers pretty quick. This guy is a private eye and they're going to be looking for him. We're not going to be in too good a spot without answers." Good old Boni. "Don't worry," I said.

So they slip a crank-up cuff on Bolkin, cut him free and take off.

"I'll keep you posted by phone," Boni shoots over his shoulder, at the door, pushing Bolkin in front of him.

Jean has absorbed everything and disapproval oozes.

"Come on, I'll take you home again Kathleen," I decide.

As we turn the first corner toward the garage, out of the corner of my eye, I spot a blacked-out car speeding down the block toward me, but it's not a quick recovery. As I throw Jean to the ground and start to hit the pavement, I hear the familiar "shave-and-a-haircut" refrain of a Thompson sub-machine gun, and the walls fall in starting with my right shoulder. When I see lights again, Jean is stuffing paper handkerchiefs where the pain is, and six or eight neighbors are standing around with their mouths open.

I sit up in about a minute and bark orders. "Jean, honey, take the wheel and hit for Uncle Looey's." With her help I get on my feet, flop in the back seat—and promptly black out again. It seems like three minutes later that we stop and Uncle Looey is helping me out. In his office, he dumps me in a chair and slices off my coat, shirt and underwear.

"Hey!" I object.

"The shirt is ruined anyway," he observes, wiping away with something that stings and stinks.

After some nice medically approved torture he binds me up in tape and gauze and sits back in his consultation chair, dragging out his usual cigar.

"Well still at it," he puffs.

"Yeah." I'm not feeling very talkative.

"There's not much tissue damage, but I'm afraid we'll have to do a tetanus series, Larry."

"Oh," I groan.

"Would you care to acquaint me with the details?" he asks quizzically.

"It was in the course of business," I answer.

He flicks an ash into the tray.

"Well—get to bed. Rest for a day or two and come back for re-dressing then."

He's a good old coot, my ex-guard-

ian. Never presses too hard. Play fish and men easy is his motto. When I tell him that my collection has been smashed, his only remark is, "I told you to engage in a less violent business. If you intend to stay in it, at least get a safe like I keep my fiddles in, and install a bell alarm."

JEAN INSISTS ON driving me to her home, and I don't argue too long. My right shoulder and arm are stiff, and I feel slightly punchy. Besides there's no place for me to sleep except on the floor, and there's always the chance that someone will come poking around after Bolkin.

I awake about noon the next day and find a complete change of clothes laid out on a chair. Apparently, Jean had returned to my apartment and done the honors. A note informed me that she had gone back for her car and would be at the office, awaiting my call. Instead of calling I go on downtown.

"How do you feel?" is the only thing Jean asks.

I am feeling O.K. and so observe.

Without any apology she takes my face in her hands and kisses me. It tastes fine.

When the phone rings, shortly, it is Boni. Bolkin is behind bars out in Greenpoint on a violation of paragraph 3(a) of page 16, and the Lieutenant is a good friend of Crosby, so he'll hibernate until such time as I want him on charges.

I call Clay at the track and am advised that he is due in about an hour, so getting out fast, I pat Jean on the shoulder, promise I'll call and take off.

At the track, I head for the grill room and order a sour. On the second sour I almost fall off the chair. Who climbs into the next stool but Josey D'Allesandro—the nearest I ever came to marriage. She is wearing a demure dress, but she's still all there. Josey originally came from the poor end of Harry Street, Brooklyn, and claims she was raised 'pasta. But there was never anything so well put together for whistles. Her legs are long, tapering and curved. Her waist

is slim and rounds out to beautifully padded hips. The breasts are well,—obviously. After taking this in, you look up to a Grecian nose inherited from her mother, a tall brow and wide, full lips.

I had done a slow take, and her almond-shaped eyes twinkled.

"Remember me?"

For an answer, I slide my good left arm around her waist and kiss her full on the lips.

"Oooh! Larry! You haven't changed!"

I sit back and let the adrenalin recede. She is a very stirring dish.

Taking her arm I lead her to a back booth where the peasants won't ogle, and seated next to her, "what are you doing now?"

Flashing her left hand under my nose, she answers, "Mostly I'm engaged to Bob Ryan, the Nassau District Attorney."

This is a surprise.

"What about your singing?"

"I'm singing with Tony Lane's band at the 'Purple Cow' in Woodside."

"No!"

This Lane combo is a hot outfit. Josey must have even gotten better with time.

A waiter pokes his nose in. "Order, sir?"

"Have you eaten yet?" I ask.

"No, but I could."

SO WE GIVE our orders, and I switch to the other side for elbow room. Waiting, I lean forward on my elbows and stare at her. The old feeling returns a little—not too much, but a little. They don't make many copies of this.

"Who's the Ryan guy who's giving away four carat stones?"

"I told you, Larry, he's—"

"Yeah, I know, Ass't D.A. in Nassau. What I mean is, what's he like and where did you meet him?"

"Well, a lot of bookies, gamblers, politicians, etc., hang out at the 'Purple Cow' and Mickey is always getting horsed into introducing them to me. One night it was Bob Ryan and well—that's about the whole story."

"He's a nice easy-going guy, and he's got piles of money and a big cadillac, and he's a perfect gentleman."

With this I get a little smirk. Then she smiles more soberly.

"He's picked out a beautiful eighteen room mansion on the north shore, we're going to have four servants and he's already paying for my apartment on the Boulevard."

What's the address?"

"Here," and she fishes out an embossed card. She's still a friendly kid and asks, "Why not come out and see the show?"

"When?"

"Tonight. I'll sing all your favorite songs. That's a promise." I'm still feeling kind of rocky from the slug-gings and lead I've been absorbing and this sounds like an idea.

"What time do you go on?"

"The first show is 9:30."

"O.K., it's a deal." We both grin at each other. I turn her hand over and nonchalantly kiss her palm—but slowly. Her breath starts to come faster and I'm satisfied. It's still there.

Josie has some tips from the boys in the band and is at the track to put down their bets in the third, fifth and sixth, so we spent the afternoon putting up twenty's on her tips and making money. Meanwhile, I get an earful about another side of Ryan. According to Josie, he's the heir to a nice fat fortune and in politics—hence the title. His hours are very irregular. He's a heavy drinker, jealous, but very generous. Also, he's kind of short, freckled and has a blond mustache.

After the sixth, I excuse myself and leave Josie alone in the box to find Clay.

"What's happened to Bolkin?" is his first shot. "He's disappeared."

"Yeah." I say and light a cigarette.

Clay looks at me shrewdly. He's not so dumb and his going right after me about Bolkin proves it.

Since I don't volunteer any more info, he drops the subject.

"Well, whatever happened, the

tickets are back to normal today. What's the pitch, Larry?"

I SMOKE IN silence for a minute or two while I figure how much I ought to tell him. I finally decide to open up a little.

"It's fairly simple. The track prints its own tickets, using special paper. This mob has been using the same paper. Today they have an acute shortage. Just let things ride until I give you the word."

"Should I call Sewell and tell him that we're back to normal?"

I shake my head. "No, Ted, the last race hasn't been run yet. By the way, who knows you're even today?"

"Just you and I. I total the take personally, and if you say so, I'll keep the totals quiet for a while."

I nod. "Good deal."

"Anything else we ought to do?"

"Do you know the owner of the paper house that supplies you with your tapes?"

"Yes, Dan Aimes is an old friend of mine."

"Well, tell him to fire the night watchman immediately and put two company cops on until further notice."

Clay looks curious and a little bewildered.

"Why?"

"Oh, just a very good hunch. O.K.?"

"O.K."

By this time it is getting near six so I phone Jean at the office. She is still there, waiting for my call.

"Hello sugar."

"Oh, finally," She's a little chilly but warms up quickly at the next question.

"What are you doing tonight?"

"Nothing, why?"

"Want to step out?"

"Umm." That means yes.

"I'll pick you up about eight-thirty. Formal."

"Ummm." That means "solid."

I get back to my apartment and find Crosby working cross-word puzzles. "What's up?" I ask.

"I'm gonna stay here and Boni's gonna chauffeur tonight."

"How come?"

"Your Uncle Looey gave us a check to see you through the week and we have to work to justify the size."

I am burned, but there's no argument. If I protest, Uncle Looey will only point at my wound and make clucking noises, and anyway it's his money.

Sure enough, Boni is at the wheel of my car when I come down shaved and dressed, and there is a gorgeous dish seated next to him.

"Where to?" asks the hired help.

When we pull up at Jean's house, she's at the door, blanketed in a voluminous cape, and we head for the "Purple Cow."

As we roll along I grudgingly make the introductions and ask that WQXR be turned on. The trip proceeds in silence—except for Boni's jokes.

It's a restrained quartet that enters the upholstered sewer, although I am secretly not too unhappy about the whole thing. It's comforting to have Boni along, and I know that after one drink it'll seem like a still better idea.

I tell the headwaiter that we are the party expected by Lois Jewel (Josie's singing name) and we get a ringside, decorated with a flat flower centerpiece. We all order a drink and when the music starts, I lead Jean to the floor to dance. It is not hard to take. Her shoulders and throat come out of the clinging strapless gown like cream. Her back muscles flex under my palm as we dance, and while wearing an elusive perfume, she clings to me in an entirely unelusive way. I am definitely reluctant to walk off the floor when the set ends. As we go back, however, the lights dim and when the floor is almost black, a bright spot floods on Josie—and then I am really upset.

Josie is vibrant. Her dress is severe white, and painted on. It extends from the base of her throat to the floor, and brings out her lines with

an accent. The only color is a flame touched orchid tied to her left wrist.

The band drifts smoothly into her song, and it is "Can't Help Lovin' That Man"—I wonder.

It is obvious that the band is big-league and so is Josie. When she knocks it dead with a flatted-fifth ending, the applause is alive.

Next she beats off a slow torchy version of "All The Things You Are" and walks off with the joint roaring for more.

As Josie plunks down in the "empty seat at the left she comments, Leave the wolves hungry, then they'll come back for more."

The applause and exertion had heightened Josie's color. She remembers Boni, and acknowledges my introductions to Jean and Doris, Boni's dish.

WHILE WE'RE swapping small talk, Pete Beggs, the boss of the joint, joins our table, and there's more introduction and chatter. When I ask Beggs if they have edible food, he acts hurt and calls for menus. Of course, they're a yard square when opened, full of adjectives and high prices. But it turns out O.K. He has a French Chef with a Holland Dutch assistant, and the waiters move fast under the Bosses' eye.

The band starts up again when we finish the soup, and it's a nice arrangement of "Where or When." I get an affirmative nod from Josie and we get up and start dancing. We dance cheek to cheek, and her mouth is right at my ear—and vice versa.

"You're looking very elegant, kid." I murmur.

She smiles in my ear.

For a number of beats we just dance, and with a skilled musician like Josie, the rythm becomes subtle and absorbing. As we execute a particularly neat maneuver, she observes, "You can still dance, all right. We ought to do this more often."

This is my susceptible night and I yield without a struggle.

"Anytime you say lady."

At this she pulls away a little and

looks me in the eye. "Are you serious?"

I'm so serious she could have me jailed for half of my present mental intentions.

I think Josie must have given the wink to Mickey, her cousin in the band, because from "Where or When" they slide right into "On The Alamo" and then "Memories Of You"—all in the same tempo—and three courses long. It's strictly velvet however, and I'm not complaiing.

I return to the table alone afterwards and my filet mignon is perfect.

As I am polishing off the last sip of Burgundy, I flick a glance at Jean and she seems quiet. I was afraid of that.

"Food all right?" I ask.

"Oh, yes, fine." She had pushed it around the plate.

Josie did another stint and returned to our table.

By now Boni had finished his demitasse, and feeling mellow started his anecdotes. The guy is funny. His newest one about a comical drunk, (with gestures and grimaces), had us all laughing, when two new faces made their appearance. Josie did the honors. The slightly bagged gent in tweeds was "Bob Ryan, Ass't D.A." and his friend, Bill Morse.

There is a shuffling of chairs, and I wind up with Ryan separating me from Josie—done by Josie, casually. Morse is up next to Boni, and they are immediately cancelled off arguing about fighters—with Doris heckling the experts.

Ryan is unexpectedly cordial and opens up with, "I understand you're investigating the losses at the Malville track", in a semi-confidential tone.

I nod.

"That's a tough nut we have to crack out there."

I lift an eyebrow. "We?"

Ryan looks somber. "Yes, you see District Attorney Whelan isn't a well man, and I'm responsible for keeping an eye on our tougher cases."

"Oh," is my bright comment. This

is news—and I'm not sure whether its good news.

"It would be a black-eye for the administration if these thieves went unpunished," Ryan says casually. I play dumb—like a fox.

"Have you had any success? I can't seem to make any real headway on this case at all." I am learning at Philo Vance's feet.

"Well," in a very confidential tone, following a pull at his scotch and soda, "I know today we scared them away, and there wasn't a bad ticket turned in." I look duly impressed.

"Very good! You—"

And Jean puts her hand on my arm and asks, "Aren't you going to dance anymore?" They're playing "Night and Day."

SO EXCUSING MYSELF, I stand up and we walk to the floor. Boni and Josie pair off, and Morse and Doris follow—leaving Ryan to work on his drink.

As we dance, I notice him order another, finish it fast and have another.

But Jean is annoyed and demands my attention.

"What kind of a date is this Larry?"

"Why?" I asked, still looking at Ryan.

"Why?" You make a spectacle of yourself with that singer, eat like a horse and now you're only interested in that drunken politician."

She is coming to a slow burn.

"Do you want to leave?"

"Yes."

"O.K."

Back at the table, I tell Josie, Ryan and Morse that we're going to push along, and we start out. "Can we give you a lift anywhere?" I ask Ryan perversely. "We're going into town for a while and there's plenty of room."

"No, thanks. I have to get on a train in an hour or so and get out to Montauk Point. Have a case coming up in the morning."

Josie looks a little piqued, but I

squeeze her hand, and whisper, "Be seeing you soon!" I was righter than I knew.

The gayety seemed to have left our foursome. Stopping at the "400" on Fifth Avenue and adjoining to the Whaler Bar made no difference. Boni and Doris are sensitive to the lull in the back seat—and I'm not in the mood to do anything about it. It is when I am after the car in the parking lot that I get the third rap on the dome.

The parking lot attendant helped me up and asked, "What happened? Was that a shot I heard?"

"Oh, no, I slipped and fell, and a car just backfired."

"Are you hurt?"

"No, no. Just a scratch."

I drive up in front of the marque, and Jean gets in front, with Boni and Doris in back.

At the house, I get out and walk her up the steps. She opens the door and walks in, apparently intending to leave me standing there, but I follow right in back of her and take her arm.

"Now look. I'm sorry the evening fizzled but I'm working on a tough case, and some of the things I did tonight, I had to do."

Silence—. She looks unconvinced.

I am patient.

"Be reasonable Jean. I got a good lead on this case tonight and—"

Bang! It hits me! How did Ryan know that they lost no money today at the track? What a dope I am!

PUSHING Jean aside I rush to her phone and dial Clay's home. It takes fourteen buzzes to arouse him.

"Ted, this is Larry Phillips. Did you tell anyone about the take today?"

"No, why?"

"Are you sure?"

Testily he bellows: "Did you wake me up at three A.M. to check that?" Poor old Ted is sore. He thinks I'm drunk.

"Yes."

"Well, damn it, I told you no," and he hangs up.

Next I dial like mad and get the Purple Cow.

"Hello, is Beggs there?"

"One moment."

"Yes?"

"This is Larry Phillips. Is Josie still there?"

"No, she left an hour ago." He's polite and uninquisitive. A good boy and a tight-mouthed one.

"O.K. Thanks."

I dial the number on Josie's card.

"Hello, Josie?"

"Yes."

"This is Larry."

"Oh, hello. Where are you?"

"I'm on my way over." I hear a gasp from Jean. "Will you be up?"

A pause.

"For you, sure."

"Attababy."

"I'll see you tomorrow, honey," I throw at Jean, and get out fast. I'd better crack this case soon else I'm going to need a new secretary.

I get Boni out on the sidewalk and explain the situation, fast. He listens while he wipes off the lipstick.

"O.K."

He takes the wheel, lets Doris out at a hack stand, and drives like a Fire-Chief's chauffeur. While we're whipping along, I fill in my story. He's all ears.

"What do I do while you're up there?"

"Wait in the car."

"Nuts. I'll get on the fire rscapc and cover your rear. You're too damn careless about those iron balconies."

When I hit Josie's bell, lightly, there's an immediate buzz, and I take the elevator to the fifth floor. She opens the door, and lets me in.

She had changed into a red robe and combed out her hair. She has a tray on the coffee table set with bourbon, ice, soda and glasses, and an all night station turned on low.

Before I do anything else, I kiss her. She hasn't got much on under the robe, and clings tight. It's a long kiss.

I finally remember Boni outside the window, so we sit on the studio couch and I mix the drinks.

"Now, what's it all about?" she asks.

"How well do you know Ryan?" I start.

She looks puzzled.

"I'm going to marry him."

"That's beside the point. Do you know anything about him?"

"What do you mean?"

"Where does he get his money? Who does he hang out with? What's his background?"

"What's it to you?" She's angry now, so I change my tack. Josie's never been a squealer.

"Do you love him?" I question softly, and meaningfully.

"Well—he gives me everything I want, and he always treats me right, and he wants me to marry him." She can't help but be honest.

"Do you love him?" This time I study her face. She shows hesitancy, so I grab her shoulders and pull her around to look at me.

"Do you?"

The tears came to her eyes.

"I don't know."

"Good. Cause he'll be a number at Sing-Sing tomorrow, Josie." She looks stunned. "Has he left any of his stuff here?" I'm relentless now.

SHE AUTOMATICALLY looks around the room. It is all Josie's taste. The poor kid hasn't even questioned my statements yet. She's still trying to absorb them.

"The only thing he brought here was a set of books. The long one over there. But, Larry—?"

I motion her quiet and flick through the books. It's the "Encyclopedia Brittanica"—the full set.

"Did he ever read them?"

"Yeah. While I was dressing or making dinner or mixing a drink, he used to go through them."

Volume 7 is the payoff, it's the regular binding, but all the pages are blank with pencil notations scrawled under date marks. It's Ryan's payoff book.

I return to the couch under the lamp and flick through the pages. He has been a sloppy bookkeeper, but it's

all there with names.

Josie watched my activity and asks, "What's all that?"

I look at her.

"Didn't you ever go through these books?"

"The Encyclopedia—Larry!" I have to laugh.

"Josie, this is evidence that your boyfriend is the kingpin in the race track job I'm working on. He's been clipping the track for plenty, and now he's going away—on this book."

Josie doesn't look quite as grieved as she ought to. She lights a cigarette and grins, "Oh well—easy come, easy go." Somehow I don't think she *liked* Ryan too well. He must have snooted her sometime.

Josie rose and went to her bedroom. She returns with a box and spills the contents on the couch. There are four bracelets, three rings and six pairs of earrings. Slipping her ring off, she tosses it into the pile and asks, "What's that worth?"

Looking it over, I see about six thousand on a quick sale, and tell her.

"Get me the six thousand and a hotel room. I'm getting out before the newspaper boys climb in."

I pocket the bundle and nod. "Good idea pack your bags."

Josie goes in to get dressed and I turn the pages in the book. It had been a cute trick on Ryan's part, to leave it here. Josie's taste runs to "Look" "Life" "Esquire" and "Downbeat" and the chances are remote that she'd ever glance at the ponderous set.

I AM ABSORBED in tracing the ramifications of the swindle when I hear, "Interesting?"

Ryan is standing in front of me with a Colt .38 aimed at my chest. Right then I feel very, very faint.

I ease my arms close to my side.

"Don't move around!" He's a wise bugger.

The spring clip on my derringer is in position—but he's on top of me and there isn't much room. The wild look in his eye is the spur, though. I lean hard to my left, the gun jumps into my left hand and we fire simultaneously. His first slug tears into my left arm, and I drop the derringer though not before two snap shots spin around. The only trouble is the slugs are too light in my French .25 and he's still got his Colt.

Also he has me covered and there's nothing to do. Six feet separate us, his right arm is untouched—and the muzzle looks big. This looks like the time to meditate on a misspent life.

The room sounds like an atom bomb went off, and when the glass stops tinkling in the window, Ryan slumps forward. I take a good, long, deep breath.

Very carefully, Boni reaches in, unlatches the window and raises it. He steps in, sliding his gun back into his hip pocket and walks over to Ryan.

We roll him over. There's a hole in the upper right chest wall oozing blood.

Boni grabs the phone and calls the local precinct. "Hello, 84th? Who's on? Guardini? This is Detective Bonilotti, 46th Precinct. I've got one slightly-used ex-District Attorney who needs an ambulance. Yeah. Get over here to 4610 Boulevard, Apartment 5-E, and bring a doctor. I think this case is closed. Yeah, O.K."

Josie has come out of the bedroom, startled by the shot in the midst of her dressing. She's got a sheer, Black robe thrown around her and little else, and—

Well, maybe I will marry Jean some day, and then again, maybe I won't. But, in any case, right now—Hmm. It's been a lovely case—and so educational too.

THE DEAD DON'T VOTE

By MARK MALLORY

Johnny Normand was a lousy newspaperman. What smart reporter would pass up a vacation in Florida to chase a crying blonde down a murder gauntlet?



Normand raised the flashlight!

I WAS less than a block from the apartment when the two of them nailed me. I was so busy thinking about the Lester Craine case that I didn't see them until one of them

grabbed me from behind and the other let me have it with the fists and knees. I struggled to break loose and managed to return a few blows, but one of them kicked me in the

A CRIME-TOWN ELECTION WHERE BULLETS WERE BALLOTS!

stomach. I went down for ten. Before I could get up I felt a foot in the side of my head.

"Had enough?" a voice growled.

I didn't bother to answer. The street was wavering and bobbing and I was scared for a moment that some of the buildings were going to fall in my face.

"Get out of the city, brother," I heard the voice continue. "Forget that you ever heard about Lester Craine. If you're not on the nine o'clock train tomorrow night you won't ever go any place again, and don't come back until after elections." Then I felt that foot again, and everything faded.

The next thing I knew, Hicks, my editor was leaning over me, saying, "Normand—what happened to you?" I tried to sit up and finally made it. My head ached and I felt weak.

Hicks helped me into his car and took me to the apartment. Somehow I made it up the steps, and into the elevator. We got as far as my door and then everything got foggy again. When I came to Hicks had me inside the apartment and was feeding me a drink.

"What happened to you?" he asked.

"A couple of the boys picked me up outside and told me to forget about the Craine case and get out of town tomorrow," I said trying to get up.

"You're going to do exactly that," Hicks said.

"The hell I am."

"Listen," Hicks said glaring down at me. "This Craine case is a lot more than it appears to be on the surface. Those babies who played rough with you mean business. You're getting out of town like they told you. From now on, we're leaving the whole business up to the police."

I began getting mad. "Listen," I said, "if you don't want my story—then I'll go to some other paper with it."

"Be reasonable," Hicks toned down a little now. "I've been getting a little dope on my own. This whole thing is tied up with next month's elections. I don't know who had it in for Craine, but one of the candidates is

going to make sure he wins the elections, and he's not going to let any half-baked reporter or anyone else stand in his way."

He took out a roll of bills, and handed me a couple. "Now take a trip down to Palm Beach, and send me back some features on the vacationers. That's an assignment."

I KNEW then that Hicks wouldn't let me stay in town. I had only been bluffing about going over to another paper. If Hicks wouldn't touch my story—then no other paper in town would.

"Okay, bright eyes," I said. "I'll send you a couple of bathing beauties."

I felt worse the next morning. My whole face was swollen and I felt like I'd been kicked by a team of horses. I called up Condon, a cop friend of mine, and arranged to meet him in a bar.

Condon was built big. His six feet four inches made me feel like a little guy. He was as tough as they come. Condon was like a cop should be. All tough on the outside and a darn good guy inside. I'd hate to have him against me.

I told him what had happened.

"Yah," he said. "I'm not surprised."

"Hicks says this whole mess is tied up with the elections. What makes me sore is the fact that Craine called me up the night he was killed and said he had something he wanted to tell me. By the time I got there, the cops were already there, and Craine was just another corpse. He wasn't even cold yet."

"Craine's not the only one around here to get that kind of treatment," Condon said. "That's just the mayor's way of getting rid of the disloyal. You know, there's six unsolved murders on our hands from this past month. And everytime it happens, certain men take over the case no matter who reports it and no matter whose beat it's on."

"So Morrow's men figured I knew something," I said. "And now I've got to get out of town."

We sat there and drank for the most of the day. It was just beginning

to get dark when I headed for the apartment to pack. It was raining hard and my bruises were giving me a lot of trouble.

By now I had the jumps. I kept looking behind me to see if I was being tailed. I noticed a girl. At first I didn't pay any attention to her, but she kept coming in my direction. She would look behind her as though she expected someone to jump out at her too. I wondered if she was following me. I tried to shake off the feeling. Here I was reading mystery into everything. I slid into a doorway and let her pass, and then I walked behind her, but at a safe distance. After a couple of blocks she noticed me and then she began to run. I just let her go. The whole world seemed to have gone scare-crazy.

I rode up the elevator because my legs ached too much to walk. I walked down the corridor slowly, not intentionally but because I had to. I turned the corner, and then—there she was again. She hadn't noticed me yet, and she was leaning up against my apartment door as though she were listening.

“**KAY, SISTER,**” I said coming up behind and grabbing her. I thought for a moment she might pass out on me, she looked so scared. “The door was opened, why didn't you just go in and make yourself comfortable?”

She just stood there and she was actually shaking. “Who are you?” she managed to say at last.

“I only live here. All right, inside. We're going to have a nice little chat.”

I thought she looked a little relieved. “Are you Johnny Normand?” she asked.

“As if you didn't know.”

We were inside now and I locked the door.

“Who are you?” I asked.

“Celia Davidson.” The name didn't ring any bells.

“Who's that?” I said going over and pouring myself a drink. I turned around and then I noticed that she wasn't any more than just a kid. She

looked scared to death, and she was soaking wet. She didn't look very dangerous and I began feeling sort of sorry for her.

“Here,” I said giving her the drink I had intended for myself. She looked grateful for a moment, then she returned to looking scared. “Now what do you want?” My voice didn't sound as hard as I had intended it to.

“I'm in trouble,” she said. I had figured as much.

“That's tough,” I said. “But trouble is out of my line.”

“You've got to help me,” she said. “I don't know who else to go to.”

“Why come to me?”

“There's no one else.”

The telephone rang, and the ring sounded tremendously loud in the quiet room. I picked up the receiver.

“Normand,” the voice said. “Send your girl friend home.” The voice sounded like that of the guy who did the talking last night.

“I'm all alone,” I said.

“Yah—,” the voice continued. “Well, if you should happen to have company—get rid of her fast if you know what's good for you. And be on that train tonight.”

I looked at Celia. She looked like she might know what had been said. I began to wonder what her game was. Whose side was she on?

“Well go on,” I said going back to her. I silently swore at myself. If I were smart I'd send her away like I'd been told to do.

“I really don't know where to begin—” she started with that scared look.

“Why don't you start at the beginning,” I said dryly.

“It's about the Lester Craine murder,” she said. She needn't have told me. I'm not that stupid. It couldn't be about anything else.

SHE TOLD me a crazy story then. It seems that a waitress had set her down with two men in a booth, and she had overheard the men talking about Lester Craine. According to her they also mentioned my name. The men hadn't noticed her at first, and then when they did, they gave her the works with the mouth

for evesdropping. When she left the restaurant one of the men had tried to grab her. That night a car had almost hit her.

It was a screwy story I didn't know whether to believe it or not. I didn't care whether it was true either. Anything concerning Lester Craine had nothing to do with me any more.

"Aw it's just your imagination," I said. "You've been reading too many mystery stories."

"That isn't all" she said weakly

"Well go on."

"I'm trying to" she said a little hysterically. "I'm trying to." She took another sip of the drink I'd given her I went over and poured myself one.

"Now my room-mate's missing She's been gone for two days—"

"So" I demanded.

"Oh can't you see?" she cried impatiently "Those men or some others thought she was me and took her away. She wouldn't just go away."

I started pacing the room. I felt rather foolish about it so I sat down. Then the clock struck six and we both jumped I felt more foolish.

"Why don't you go to the police?" I said at length.

"I did—I did," she repeated in a quiet voice. "But they just laughed at me. They didn't want to do anything about it. They said they'd check, but they haven't done anything."

I felt sorry for this kid now. She was probably in as bad as I was, and she knew even less about everything than I did. But all of a sudden I got mad at her for coming to me with her story. I got mad at the world in general.

"Why pick on me to spill your troubles to?" I said.

"Because I heard those men mention your name, and because you were the one who was writing the stories about Lester Craine."

"Listen," I burst out. "I can't help you. I don't know anything about all of this. I was just assigned the story of Lester Craine's wife being dead. I hadn't even heard of the guy before. I go over to get the story, and Craine seems scared to talk. Then Craine calls me up and says he wants to see

me. When I get there he's dead."

She just sat there listening to me, looking as though she might start crying at any minute, with her hands clutched tightly in her lap.

I continued my sob story. "Last night a couple of the boys grab me and tell me to get out of town. When I come to, I'm pretty badly angled. My boss tells me to lay low, so I'm scrambling tonight at nine. I don't get much of this—and I'm sorry but I can't help you."

She just sat there for a minute, still looking as though she were going to cry. She didn't even look as though she was going to cry. She didn't even look as though she blamed me. In a minute, she got up. She didn't say anything at all—just got up and left.

I cursed myself out thoroughly in the next few seconds, but I didn't know what I could do to help her. I'd probably pick up a paper tomorrow morning and find out she'd been killed. I wanted to run after her, but I kept telling myself, "Be smart and stay healthy."

I WENT to the window. I could see her when she came out of the building. She looked all around when she came to the corner, and then started across the street. Then, all of a sudden, a car came from nowhere straight at her. She fell down, and I couldn't tell whether she'd been hit or not.

I didn't wait for the elevator. I ran down the four flights of stairs. A couple of times I thought I was going to fall flat on my face, but I made it. By the time I got to her, there was a crowd of people around her. Like all crowds, they just stood around looking helpless.

She was standing up looking very stunned, but I guessed that she hadn't been hurt. When she saw me, she gave me a sort of weak smile. Everyone around was talking at once, and no one seemed to know what to do. I pushed a couple of people aside, and took her by the arm.

"Can you walk?" I said roughly.

She just nodded. The people began to move on. I pushed a few more peo-

ple away and we went back to my apartment. She hadn't said anything all this time. All the fight seemed to have gone from her. I took her wet raincoat and she stood there, not helping me at all. I made her sit down, and then she let loose with the tears. She sat there and just bawled. She didn't make much noise, but it was a desperate kind of crying because she didn't have any control over it.

I let her cry for a couple of minutes. Then I went and poured her a drink. A drink is usually good for any situation. She didn't look as though she could even hold the glass so I sat down and fed it to her. I was still mad, but it was a different kind of madness now. She was just a kid, and she was being involved in all of this mess because she overheard a conversation.

After awhile she stopped crying and I made her lie down. She sat up after a few seconds. "I'm okay," she said. "I'm sorry I made such a fuss. I don't usually cry."

I thought for a moment that I was going to laugh crazily. The situation was so stupid. Here she almost gets killed and she apologizes for crying.

"Listen," I said. "I hate to be so hard on you—but we've got to find out what this is all about, or we may not live long. Can you remember anything about that conversation? What did they say about Craine?"

SHE DIDN'T say anything for a minute, then she began. "They said something about the fact that it was too bad that Craine had gotten yellow because he would have made a good comptroller. They also said that the chief was pretty mad about Craine and his wife's dying—that it made him look pretty bad to have too many unsolved murders on his hands—and that Morrow had promised that the boys wouldn't be so rough in the future."

I wasn't surprised. This all tied up with what Hicks and Condon had told me. That was why Celia couldn't get any help from the police. There were just enough men on the force

mixed up in this to tie everything up.

I told her the set-up—at least as much of it as I knew.

"What will they do with Judy—my room-mate?" she asked looking sick again.

"I don't like to think," I said, but I gave it to her cold. "They probably thought they were getting you. Anyway it was a kidnap job, and they can't afford to let her live now."

She took it straight. "What are we going to do?" she asked tonelessly. I began to think fast. "I've got to appear to be taking that train tonight," I said. "That will throw them off my tail for a little while. You can stay here until I get back. It's a chance to take. The boys may come up here looking for you after I've gone—but we can't do anything else. They'll be watching the outside of the building for me probably."

We sat around for awhile and had another drink. I took an old suitcase out of the clothes closet. Finally it was time for me to go.

"Listen," I said. "You'll have to stay here in the dark. If you hear anyone trying to get in—hide."

I didn't see anything unusual when I got to the street, so I hailed a taxi. Sure enough, as soon as I was heading toward the depot, I saw the car following us. I was being escorted to the station. I wasn't worried though. I didn't expect any trouble. The boys just wanted to make sure that I left town.

I stayed on the train until it stopped in a little burg about 20 miles out of town. Then I hopped the next train back into the city. I took a taxi to my place, watching closely behind me all the time. No one seemed to be following.

I went in through the back door, and walked up the four flights of stairs. I opened the door and flashed on the lights.

"Celia," I called. She came out of the bedroom, looking very small and tired.

"I kept my fingers crossed," she said. "I was scared to death something might happen to you." Somehow her worrying about me made

me feel a little better. I walked over to her, and mussed up her hair. I wondered what it would be like to kiss her.

"You'd better save your worrying for later," I said. I sat down and tried to think of our next move.

"Is there a back door to your place," I said.

"Yes."

"I think we'd better go over there and have a look around. The boys should leave us alone tonight." I really didn't expect to find anything over there. But it was better than sitting around doing nothing.

WE WALKED down the stairs again, and my legs didn't feel any too steady. I felt sick to my stomach. I wished I could just go to bed and forget this whole rotten mess.

We took a subway to her place. It's harder to trail a person in the subway just in case we were being tailed.

We went up to her apartment through the backway. This whole thing was beginning to seem unreal—like the melodrama of some cheap detective movie. I kept wishing over and over again that we were just watching a movie.

It was after eleven and we didn't see any signs of life in the hallway of the apartment. Celia opened her apartment door. I started to walk in, and suddenly I couldn't breathe. I pushed Celia back and closed the door—not too quietly.

"The room is full of gas," I choked.

"Somebody's been there," she said looking very weak. "I didn't leave the gas on in there."

"I'm going in," I said. "To have a look around. You stay here and duck if you see anyone coming."

"What do you expect to find in there?" she said, grabbing my arm and clutching it fiercely. I could feel her nails through my sleeve. I jerked loose, roughly.

"Stop it," I said. "This is no time for hysterics."

She obeyed then. She leaned against the wall and closed her eyes. I was afraid for a moment that she wasn't going to be able to stand up.

But she opened her eyes and stayed there.

I put a handkerchief over my nose and mouth, and took a deep breath of air. Then I went into that room. But I didn't need to, because I already knew what I would find. I opened a window quickly, and breathed some good clean air, then I put the handkerchief over my face again. I found the light switch and pushed it. Then I looked around.

A girl was stretched out on the davenport. I didn't go near her because it was obvious that she was dead. Her face was terribly contorted. I didn't know much about death but I was certain you didn't look that way if you died from too much gas. Gas is supposed to be the easy way to go—just like falling asleep they say. This girl hadn't just fallen asleep. But I would have bet my bottom dollar that the cop who reported this case would report it as suicide by gas. All of a sudden I just wanted to get out of that room. I wanted to get as far away as possible.

JUDY WAS in the same position I had found her. What I had seen must have been written all over my face when I came out of there.

"What's in there?" she whispered.

"Nothing," I said, taking her by the arm and trying to head for the stairs. "Nothing at all."

"Don't lie to me," she said fiercely. "What's in there. Tell me or I'll go in."

"Nothing," I said again. I was afraid that someone would hear us talking.

"Stop it," she cried. "Judy's in there, isn't she?"

There was no use in lying. She would stay there all night if I didn't tell her.

"Yes, she's in there," I said. "She's in there—dead. Now let's get out of here. The police may be here any minute."

She just stood there and she began to whimper like some little pup. She stood there, moaning softly.

I slapped her then, just as hard as I could. She put her hand to her

cheek where I had hit her, and looked at me blankly, but she quit the whimpering, and followed me now.

Somehow we got back to the apartment.

We were in it thick now. The boys meant business. They wouldn't stop until they found Celia—and they'd probably be waiting for me too.

Then I had an idea. I called Hicks, my lousy editor. He was our only chance. He knew people. It was funny—I was scared to death for my own skin—but all of a sudden it seemed much more important than just Celia's and my life—and Judy's too. It seemed damned important that just anyone could walk down any street he wanted to without someone taking a pot shot at him or trying to run him down with a car.

I had trouble getting Hicks. He wasn't at the office. I tried his home. Finally I heard his harsh voice at the other end of the line.

"Listen, Hicks, this is Normand."

"What are you doing in town?" he roared.

"I'm over at Craine's place," I lied. "I've just found out something new."

"Listen," he said, "I'll be there in fifteen minutes. Just sit tight."

Celia was beginning to come alive by this time.

"Honey, this is it." I cried hugging her tightly. "This may be our chance to get out of this whole damned mess."

We grabbed a cab in front of the place. I looked out of the back window. No one was following this time.

WE DROVE up in front of Craine's house. Hicks' car was already there. There were no lights on inside the house. We eased up the walk. The front door was opened. We walked in. Someone flashed a light in our eyes.

"Hicks," I said.

"Yah," he answered. "It's me."

It was Hicks all right. But he wasn't alone. There were a couple of other fellows with him.

"Hello, wise guy," one of the guys said.

Then "Don't pull anything." I felt

a gun in my back. Everything began to add up suddenly. Hicks was in on this whole thing too. That's why he had found me last night. Oh, if anyone was stupid in this world, it was me. My stupidity was going to cost Celia and me our lives.

They took us out to the car, and pushed us in, and the lad with the gun climbed in beside us.

"You too, Hicks," I said, feeling even more weary.

"Why couldn't you have gone to Palm Beach like a nice boy," Hicks said.

I started to swear at him, and then something struck me on the back of the neck. The floor of the car came up—only gentle-like and I reached for it through a deep fog. No strain at all.

When the blackness began to wear away, my first thought was of Celia. I tried to sit up, and at last was successful. My head ached, and my stomach rocked for several minutes. I was on a cement floor and Celia was kneeling beside me.

"Oh Johnny," she sobbed. I put my arms around her.

"It's okay kid," I lied, and I found myself thinking how very nice it was to hold Celia in my arms. The idea flashed through my mind that I would like to die holding her in my arms, and then I remembered that at least part of my wish would be answered.

"I told you, you shouldn't have come to me for help," I said at a feeble attempt of humor.

"Are they going to kill us?" she asked with no expression in her voice.

"Yes, Celia, I'm afraid they're going to, unless a miracle happens," I said.

"No miracle is going to happen." I heard the harsh voice of Hicks. He stood at the top of the stairs leading to the room. "Well, wise guy, you could be basking in the sun at Palm Beach, if you'd played it smart."

"Hi Hicks," I said. Another figure stood in the doorway. It was Morrow, the mavor. "And Morrow," I added. "I feel honored."

"Don't bother," he said.

"You must really want to win this election," I said.

"I do."

"Enough to murder a lot of people who don't know what the whole thing's about," I could hear my voice rising.

"Oh save it," he yelled.

"Enough to kill Craine, and his wife, and a girl you happened to pick up by mistake." I was yelling too.

Morrow's voice was suddenly perfectly composed.

"Yes," he said. "And I'm ready to kill as many as try to stand in my way."

I remembered that it was at times like these that someone always said, "You'll never get away with it you know." So I said, "You'll never get away with it, you know."

"Shut up," said Hicks. "We'll get away with this and plenty more. They won't even find your body for a couple of months."

"Listen you," Morrow began. "Just who is on this besides you and your lovely friend."

THIS WAS a new angle. If he hadn't mentioned it, I never would have thought of it. Maybe I could pull something on these fellows.

"Plenty of people," I sneered.

"You wouldn't like to give a few names," Morrow asked—no expression in his voice.

"Not tonight gentlemen, some other time perhaps. I tried unsuccessfully to lie down."

"Okay, take over," Morrow said to someone behind him. He stepped aside to let some bruiser come inside. It was one of the boys who had done me over before. He jerked me to my feet, and kicked me in the stomach. I folded like a rug. I tried to get up but my body wouldn't respond. He pulled me up and repeated the treatment. I managed to land one feeble punch in the direction of his face before I sat down.

I could feel myself going under again, and I fought against it. From a great distance I heard Celia sob. The room wavered and then settled down. This fellow pulled me to my feet again. I tried to think. This was getting me nowhere.

"Nobody knows," I said feebly. "Nobody at all."

Morrow called off his man then, and they held a consultation. They must have decided that I was telling the truth because they left me alone after that.

I sat down in a heap and didn't try to get up. Celia came over. She was crying now.

"Oh Johnny," she sobbed. "Why don't they just kill us and get it over with?"

"Don't wish so hard," I said. "You'll get it fast enough."

I had to think. There must be some way out of this. I looked over the room. We must be in a basement. There were only two tiny openings for windows near the ceiling—neither large enough for a human body.

"Celia," I said. "We've got to think of some way to get out of this. There's got to be a way."

But if there was a way I couldn't see it. I wondered what time it was. They probably want to kill us before it got light.

I heard steps outside the door, and it was the two henchmen again. They both had guns.

"Okay, you two. This is it," one of the men said. "Get moving." One of them led us upstairs to the main part of the house and then outside to the car we had come in.

"Get in the back seat, and don't try nothing," the one who did the talking said. The other one climbed in the driver's seat, and this one sat beside him. The car motor turned over, and in a few minutes we were on our way.

"Would you like to kiss your girlfriend good-bye," the talkative guy said.

I looked at Celia. "Yes," I answered. "I would."

I kissed her then, and for a part of a minute, I was lost in the soft wonderousness that was her.

"That was real pretty," our friend drawled.

I SETTLED back in the seat and tried to be comfortable. I ached so that it hurt to make the slightest movement. I looked down at the dirty floor of the car.

From a long distance behind us I heard a siren wail. The two men in front both looked behind quickly.

"Shake them," the talkative one said. The driver pressed down harder on the accelerator, and we bounced along.

"Start praying they don't catch up with us," our friend said. "Or there's going to be a couple of dead cops joining you."

It was useless to hope that they would catch up with us. This was a high-powered job. If only we could do something to help. I looked desperately around trying to find something—anything that would act as a weapon. Celia was in my arms again, very frightened. If the cops started shooting, we'd be the first to be hit and it's just as hard to die from a cop's lead as from henchmen's.

We were so damned helpless just sitting there. My eyes darted throughout the car, noticing everything. I looked back to that dirty floor. Then I saw it. It was the flashlight, and my hopes soared suddenly.

"There's a flashlight on the floor," I whispered to Celia. "It's our only chance."

But was it a chance? If this car wrecked at the speed it was going, we'd have little chance of getting out alive. But it was a chance nevertheless.

"Watch for a break," I whispered. "When I hit our friend with the gun, you grab for the driver. Get him by the throat and choke to kill. We may all be killed but it's our only chance."

I slid my hand down to the floor. Celia watched the two men intently.

The guy with the gun looked back again. "We're losing them, Bart," he said. "Just a little more speed." The driver pressed the accelerator to the floor.

THE GUY WITH the gun suddenly noticed me.

"What are you doing?" he yelled. Then he saw the flashlight. "Drop it," he said. He pointed the gun at me. It was now or never.

I brought the flashlight forward and he shot at the same time. I felt a sharp pain in my right arm. But I had hit him too. He slumped to the floor. Celia grabbed the driver by the throat. The car swerved dangerously and made weird patterns on the road but she hung on. There was a desperate jamming of the brakes. I raised the flashlight again and hit the driver. Both Celia and I grabbed for the wheel. It spun crazily and the car left the road. I could feel it hit the ditch and roll over. I felt myself going under. I fought against it. I heard Celia's voice calling my name over—and—over—again.

When I came to, there were a lot of people around. The cops from the car were there too, asking Celia a lot of questions. Neither of the two gunmen were awake yet.

"Listen," I said to the cops. "Take us to the FBI. We were kidnapped." They took one look at my arm and didn't give me any argument.

The whole thing was simple after that. Up to this time, I had been going around under the illusion that all cops were stupid. These guys were plenty smart. They had been wise for a long time now that Morrow and his gang were not on the up and up, and they had almost been ready to close when I spilled my story about the whole business and the kidnapping, it clinched the deal. We didn't have to worry about Mayor Morrow or Hicks or any of that gang.

They took me to a hospital after that and gave me something to make me sleep, as if I needed it. Just before I dropped off, Celia came to see me. Despite everything she looked wonderful to me.

"Celia," I said. "I'm sorry I hit you last night."

"I'm not," she said and she looked as though she meant it. She was standing close to the bed and I thought she was the loveliest creature I had ever seen. She leaned down over me and kissed me. Her lips on mine were the last thing I remembered just before I dropped off.

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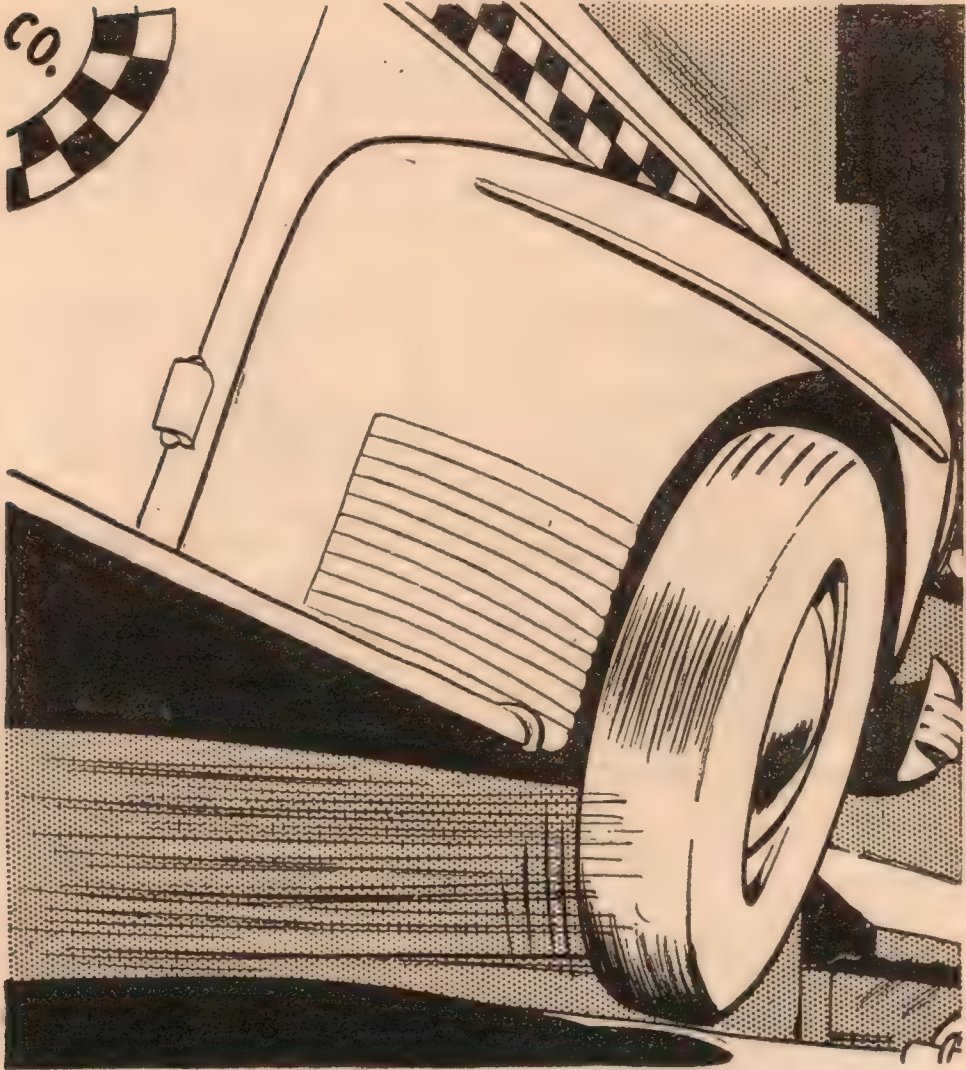
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HAPPY DEATHDAY TO



HE WAS a nice enough little guy. He wasn't hurting anybody; he wasn't doing anything wrong. He was just moving along Forty Second Street with the lunch hour crowds, liking the sweet new smell of Spring in the air and the bright sun in the Cobalt sky. He thought about how good it was to be alive on a day like this and looked wistfully at all the pretty stenos in the crowd and wished for his youth

again.

The little man was about five feet tall, slightly built except for the small pot belly that comes with middle age. His face was lined and weather-beaten to a leathery finish. He had a broad, humorous mouth and a bulbous nose, full of broken veins. His eyes were small and deep set, blue and somehow kindly looking under wispy gray brows. He was an ugly little guy in a pleasant, likeable sort

ALL THESE DEATHS WERE JUST CRAZY ACCIDENTS—BUT SO

YOU

FASCINATING FEATURE
LENGTH NOVEL

By **ROBERT TURNER**

Author of "I'll Be Slaying You!"



He leaped into the air and three feet forward!

*To Mr. Betts, murder was just a workday business matter—
killing a man was the same as scratching a horse from a race . . .*

of way.

His sport coat had huge plaids that had once been blue and gray. The shoulders were padded to give the appearance of nice build. But they had become bent and broken down.

The cuffs and lapels of the jacket were frayed. There was no crease in it. It was hard to tell that the sport jacket had cost a hundred and fifty dollars three years ago.

Under the sport coat he wore only

CONVENIENT FOR MR. BETTS! — FEATURE - LENGTH NOVEL

a stained and dingy T-shirt. His trousers had once been gray gabardine slacks that had cost forty five dollars. That was before they had been slept in for weeks at a time. That was before it looked like he was carrying apples in the knees of the trousers and they had cuffs instead of just ragged bottoms.

He came to a newstand and moved crabwise through the midtown crowds to it and bought a morning paper. He turned right to the racing section, scanned the results of yesterday's racing and the happy look left his face. He scowled and broke out in an angry mutter. "Eight day straight without one favorite winning!" he raged. "That damned Mr. Betts! He'll ruin racing. But Kim Magee will stop him. Kim's coming back and I'll get him, this time!"

A fat lady next to the little man looked at him queerly through her harlequin glasses, wondering what on earth he was mumbling about. The characters you saw in New York, she thought. But the little man paid no attention to anyone around him. He kept the newspaper up in front of his face, studying the racing charts intently. They were his bible, his life.

HE CAME to the Fifth Avenue corner with the crowds, pushed with them to midstreet, where they were suddenly stranded in a little island as the light changed. Fast traffic sped by both sides of the jammed-together pack of pedestrians, some vehicles coming dangerously close. A stout man sucked in his paunch and swore as a hack almost took the buttons off his vest. A woman shopper, loaded with packages, arched her back and swivered her ample hips as a speeding bus swished the back of her skirt.

In the front ranks of this traffic-stranded island of people, stood the little man. He didn't care, hardly knew how close the cars were coming. He was a native New Yorker and used to it. He didn't even watch it. When it was safe to cross, he would feel the people on each side

of him and behind him, surge forward. He would go along. Meanwhile, he continued reading his paper.

Suddenly, though, he let out an anguished scream of pain. His back arched. The newspaper fell fluttering from his fingers. He leaped into the air and three feet forward, one hand slapping at his rump.

The driver of the cab didn't know what had happened until it was too late, until it was all over. He wasn't exactly speeding. He was doing about thirty, racing to beat the light. That was fast enough. The little man's feet were still off the ground when the cab's left fender hit him squarely. He was flung end over end through the cab, flat on his back. The cab made a final, screeching halt, eighteen inches away from the prostrate figure.

A traffic cop blew his whistle until it's vibrating screams hurt the eardrums. Traffic piled up. Cars bumped into each other. The driver of the cab that had struck the little man, leaped out, ran up front. He stopped by the still figure with its outflung arms and legs. The little man's mouth was open. His eyes were open but rolled back into his head so that he looked milky blind. He didn't move at all.

The cabbie said: "I couldn't help it, couldn't help it. He jumped right in front of me. It ain't my fault, I tell you!"

Nobody said it was but the hackie kept reiterating innocence just as the fat woman with the harlequin glasses kept screaming and screaming and several little office workers kept fainting, one after the other, even though it was all over and the little man was dead and nobody could do anything about it.

Several men told the cop what had happened, how the little fellow had yelled and leaped forward right in front of the cab. One witness said somebody had pushed the little man. Another said, not at all, he just suddenly went berserk, decided to commit suicide

A tall, skinny old spinster, with large, frightened eyes behind her hornrimmed spectacles, timidly said: "I—I was standing close to him. I saw—saw what happened. Another man standing behind the little chap, stuck a pin—or a needle—or *something*—into him. At least that's what it looked like.... Yet, I don't know. Why—why, would anybody want to do that?"

Nobody answered her. They hardly heard her. They paid no attention. Everybody was babbling at once now and there was a great pushing and milling around and the cop and the cabbie were trying to listen to all of them at the same time.

Several people pushed in front of the old spinster. She tried vainly to get attention. But everyone ignored her and she was used to that so she finily eased back out of the crowd. She would have liked to hang around and *make* somebody listen to her because she knew what she had seen, even though it didn't seem to make sense. But she didn't have the nerve. Besides, she would be late getting back to her office and she had not been late, returning from lunch, for eighteen years.

Anyhow, she reasoned, it had happened so quickly, she hadn't even gotten a look at the man who had stuck the pin in the little fellow. She wondered vaguely if it had been timed and figured that the little man would leap out into the fast traffic that way, when jabbed with something sharp. That would make it murder. But, no, she thought, murder was never committed in such a simple, open sort of way, in front of a thousand witnesses....

THE CHICAGO Flyer pulled in to Grand Central at eleven fifty A. M. Kim Magee stood in the vestibule of the front car from the time the train entered the long tunnel under Park Avenue, looking at his watch, fidgeting. When the train stopped and the doors opened, Kim was the first passenger off.

With a small pigskin bag swing-

ing from his right hand, he headed up the platform toward the stairs in long, loping strides. He moved with an easy, almost lazy grace. Dressed in a faultlessly tailored blue gabardine suit and wearing a gray, snapbrimmed fedora, Kim was a little better than average height, slim but compactly built. His face was clear-skinned, full at the jaw hinges, without a trace of jowl. His mouth was deep with a sullen tightness at the corners. He had a short, straight nose. He looked like any typical young American business man. Until you saw his eyes.

Kim's Magee's eyes changed color constantly. They could be deep blue and smiling one minute, dark purple and almost sad the next. They could get the color of gunsteel. They could fade and blur and become cold and almost colorless so that you couldn't look into them without flinching. All these things could happen in his eyes but his face didn't change expression.

Kim's eyes were blue and wistful now as he took the stairs two at a time and came out into the huge, echoing marble palace that was Grand Central Terminal. It was the first time Kim had been in New York City for three years. He passed between roped off throngs come to meet arrivals on the Flier. He didn't look at them. Nobody would be there to meet him. ,

Long, slender sunbeams, dancing with dust motes, flanted across the station. Kim listened to the beat of footfalls echoing against the high ceiling and the honking and roaring of traffic out on the street. A corner of his mouth lifted in a crooked grin. A dimple pocked his cheek momentarily. It was good to get back. This was his town. In spite of all that had happened to him here. He fought off the faint stirrings of nightmare memories in the back of his mind. He wouldn't let any of that haunt him now. He had licked the past and those memories. He had come back now and that proved it.

From the end of the line of people behind ropes, watching arrivals from

the Chicago train, a young boy darted toward Kim Magee. A man had been standing with him. He had pointed Kim out, had given the boy a shove toward him.

The kid was small and towheaded and ragged. His face was smudged with shoe polish. His brown eyes were hard and bright in the way of boys who had to scabble and fight the big town for a living. Over one thin shoulder a shoebox was slung. He held it from swinging with his left hand as he ran toward Kim. In his right hand, he held a small white card.

The bootblack came up to Kim, grinning: "Mr. Magee?" he said.

Kim nodded, his eyes on the card in the kid's hand. The boy thrust the card at him, said: "I was told to give you this."

It looked like an ordinary calling card, only in place of the usual name and address, there was a black silhouette of a race horse, with a skeleton riding it. Engraved in fine script underneath the picture was the name, *Mr. Betts*. There was nothing else on the card.

UNDER THE shadow of his hatbrim, Kim Magee's eyes grew bleak. He put his hand over them for a second. Maybe he was just tired from the long train trip. Maybe it was a touch of the madness coming back and he was seeing things. He took his hand away from his eyes and looked at the card again. The kid was still standing there. He watched Kim viciously rip the card into small pieces, let them fall from his fingers. He looked at Kim's eyes and backed away to turn and run, fright suddenly on his face.

Kim set his bag down, reached out and grabbed the kid's arm, held him. "Where did you get that card?" His voice was deadly low and level. "Who sent you? Who told you to give me that?"

The boy jerked his head back toward the roped off waiting section. "That guy over there." His brown eyes widened. "Jeeze, he's gone, mis-

ter! He scrambled. He ain't there no more."

Kim's fingers felt the youngster's arm. The boy grabbed his arm with the other hand, wincing, rubbing it. Kim's eyes searched the crowds behind the ropes and passing back and forth across the station. He saw nobody he knew.

"What did the man look like?" he said.

The kid took a deep breath. "He was kinda tall, wearing a dark suit I dunno, he just sort of—"

"That's all right," Kim stopped him. "Forget it sonny."

Some of the grayness flowed from Kim's gaze and turned to a softer blue. He forced a quick smile. He dug a quarter from his pocket, flipped it to the kid. "I'm sorry, sonny," he said. "It wasn't your fault. I didn't mean to scare you."

The footblack caught the quarter, flashed a quick grin, ducked his head and scampered away in the crowd.

Kim picked up his traveling bag, walked on toward the exit. Halfway across the station, the loudspeaker system blared out: "Attention! Mr. Kimball Magee! Attention Mr. Kimball Magee! Please come to the station master's office for a telephone message." The voice repeated several times, echoing against his eardrums.

A redcap directed him to the Station Master's office. The girl there gave him a slip of paper. It said: "Call MA 4-6890, immediately. Important."

He found a phone booth, dialed the number. The ring was answered instantly. That is, the receiver was lifted off the hook at the other end. But nobody said anything. Kim waited. His knuckles on the hand holding the phone, grew white. He said: "Hello is anybody there?"

Still nobody answered. They laughed, though. Kim heard a familiar, throaty chuckle. He said: "Listen, damn it, I was told to call this number. If I wanted to play games, I'd go to a Bingo club. I'm hanging up."

A husky, obviously disguised voice, said: "Don't do that, Kim."

"Who is this?"

"Don't you know, Kim?" the voice said. "Didn't you get my card?"

"Mr. Betts!"

"You're such a smart boy, Kim. See that you stay that way. Give up that job you've come back to take. Get out of New York and stay out, this time. The city—the racing world—isn't big enough for both of us. I haven't forgotten that little episode on the bridge, three years ago."

"Listen," Kim said. "I don't know who you are. Except that you're a phony. You—you can't kid me. Mr. Betts is dead. I know—I—you can't pull a silly gag like this and get away with it."

"It's no gag, Kim. One more thing. It's too bad about Fritz Muller. I feel badly about that. It's a shame. He was a nice old duffer in his way. If you hadn't come back it wouldn't have had to happen. But I had to let you know this *isn't* a gag, that I'm alive and that I mean business. I think this one warning will be enough. You wouldn't want what happened to Fritz, to happen to anybody else. I'll give you until the ten p. m. train leaves for Chicago, tonight."

The line clicked dead, then. The party at the other end hung up. Kim Magee let the phone fall from his fingers. It banged against the booth. He didn't bother to pick it up and set it back on the hook. He let it hang. He pushed open the door of the booth, stepped out into the station corridor. He shoved his hat back on his head, pulled a handkerchief from his breast pocket and dabbed globules of sweat from his forehead and upper lip.

Kim looked at the hurrying crowds, the misty-like wisps of madness fogging up again in the back recesses of his mind. He looked at a woman trying to quiet a wailing five year old as she dragged him along by the arm. A big, gawky kid in too short trousers was buying an armload of comics at the newsstand across from the phone booth. Redcaps hustled by, lugging baggage. Women

flounced past, gossiping laughing. Outside, traffic hummed and roared. Everything was normal. People were going about their everyday business. This was New York City. There was a cop talking to a pretty girl, fifty feet away from Kim. This was, May, midday, 1947.

Things like that telephone call couldn't happen. There was no demented, ruthless killer still around, with a flair for the melodramatic and a sure fire method of taking hundreds of thousands of dollars from horse players—at the expense of human lives. Three years ago, yes. But But not today, not now. The man who called himself Mr. Betts was dead. This could only be some second rate thug, some cheap imitator, trying to take his place, Kim knew. Some gagster, maybe, some practical joker, with a twisted sense of humor.

His mind, as he walked through the long, thronged arcades of the terminal, toward the street, slipped back tortuously, into that nightmare series of events, to make sure of that.

IT HAD STARTED about four years ago. Kim Magee owned a string of twenty-four thoroughbred race horses, then. Good ones, too, with only a few cheap platers in the bunch. He had most of the fortune left him by his father, invested in that stable and he made it pay like any good business. He had the best trainers and the best riders under contract to him. It was a known fact that when you bet on a Magee horse, you got a ride for your money; the horse was out to win, not for exercise or to build up odds for some future race. The Kim Magee stable and everyone connected with it was honest.

Then one day, a week before a fifty thousand dollar stake race at New England, Kim Magee received a phone call. A strange voice said: "Hello, Kim, since you and I are going to be doing quite a bit of business together in the future, I might as well identify myself."

"What kid of business?" Kim said,

suspiciously.

There was an understanding laugh. "Kim, I'm known as Mr. Betts. And I'm in the bookmaking business. I make book on the horses. I take bets. That's pretty cute, isn't it?"

"Very cute," Kim admitted, frowning. "But look, brother, I'm pretty busy right now. I haven't got time to kid around. Suppose you call someone else and have your fun. I—"

"Oh, this isn't supposed to be funny, Kim," the voice cut in. "It's quite serious. If you'll just be patient, I'll get to the part that concerns you. And it very definitely does. In the first place, I'm not just any ordinary, garden variety kind of bookie. I've found a new twist."

Kim was getting annoyed. "Look, fella, I don't know what this is all about but I don't see how it can possibly concern me. You sure you've got the right party?"

"Quite sure." The voice chuckled. "You see, Kim, most people have the mistaken idea that all bookmakers get rich in a hurry, that there's no risk, that *they* never get taken to the cleaners. That's not so, of course. Bookmakers often get hit hard. Especially when they take large bets on future races where the good horses frequently run true to form. I'm eliminating that risk. I never get hit and have to pay off on one of those big races. Take your horse, Sunbonnet, Kim the one entered in the Pilgrim Stakes next Saturday."

"Now, w-a-i-t a minute," Kim said. "I—"

The voice cut him off. "Well, you're not going to let Sunbonnet win that race, Kim. See what I mean? You're going to make the jockey pull up. You can take second, third, or fourth money with her, if you want, but under no circumstances can Sunbonnet win. Understand?"

KIM LAUGHED. This was getting funny. The cranks you ran into, in this game. "Do you know what you're saying? Even if we hadn't been pointing Sunbonnet for this race for months, even if we

didn't want her to win, Jimmy Korio is riding her. You couldn't *make* Jimmy pull up with a horse, if you—"

"That's *your* problem, Kim," Mr. Betts broke in. "If Jimmy doesn't want to behave, put another boy up on Sunbonnet. She's got to be held back. That's my new twist, don't you see. I'll have about fifty thousand dollars bet with me on that race. Forty of it will be on Sunbonnet as the odds—on favorite. When Sunbonnet runs out, I clean up."

Kim's face was hot with blood, now. His knuckles, gripping the receiver, stood out whitely. He said: "I don't know who you think you are, Betts, or how much money you're offering but you won't get this stable to throw a race. Try your tinhorn tricks somewhere else."

"I wouldn't think of offering you money," Mr. Betts went on, calmly. "That would eat into my profits. And I know the famous Kim Magee can't be bought. But get this. You'll do as I've instructed or within twenty four hours after the race, Jimmy Korio, your star jockey, will be dead!"

The receiver banged in Kim's ear. He stood there, looking at the phone, raging inside. Gradually, though, his sense of humor took hold. He began to laugh. The whole thing was so ridiculous, so absurd. Somebody was kidding around. It was a gag. He was sure of that, when he got a little card in the mail the next day. It was in a plain white envelope, with no return address. It had a tiny, solid black picture of a horse with a skeleton jockey riding it and beneath it was inscribed the name, Mr. Betts. Kim threw the card away and put the whole thing out of his mind.

The next Saturday, Sunbonnet, with Jimmy Korio up, won the Pilgrim Stakes by three lengths. Kim was happy about that. It was a feather in his cap, a prize much sort after by all the top horsemen. It put Sunbonnet up in a class with the top money winners of all time.

But Sunday morning, Kim wasn't so happy any more. He learned that

Jimmy Korio had been killed the night before, when his car stalled on a railroad track. It was an accident, everybody said. Everybody except Mr. Betts, who called Kim on the phone shortly afterward. He said:

"Too bad you didn't take me seriously, Kim. Jimmy was a fine boy. He had a great future ahead of him. I was a little afraid something like that was going to have to happen, though. I find stable owners hard to convince the first time I give them orders. But you'll fall in line, next time, won't you, Kim?"

The line went dead before Kim could say anything. He told himself over and over that it was an accident, the way Jimmy Korio died. The police had investigated. It couldn't be anything else. Nobody could work a kill that cleverly. But somehow, his own convictions didn't take. Kim Magee began to be a little afraid.

He remembered that the voice on the phone had intimated that other stable owners had been getting the same treatment and it came to Kim that within the last few months, there had been several other prominent jockeys suddenly and accidentally killed after big races. As he recalled, now, those jocks, too, had ridden winners which had been odds-on-favorites.

For a couple of weeks then, there were no more phone calls, even though Kim had one of his horses entered in another big race. But his entry wasn't the favorite that time. It didn't win, either. Nor did the favorite. The second choice horse won and Kim, watching that race, noticed that although it was impossible to tell for sure whether or not the favorite was pulled-up, he was certainly given a very weak ride.

THE NEXT call that Kim, got, he hung up the instant he heard Mr. Betts' casually cold voice. When the phone rang again, he took it off the hook and left it that way. Kim Magee was a stubborn man. That stubbornness cost the life of another good jockey. Even though Kim had not

taken the threatening telephone call, that time, he'd known what it was about, what race. When his horse, the favorite, won it, he assigned a couple of bodyguards to accompany the jockey, Abe Lubitz, everywhere he went, following the race.

Bodyguards might be some use against ordinary attempts at killing, Kim found out, but not against Mr. Betts. Abe Lubitz was found dead and one of his bodyguards had both legs broken, after a hit-and-run accident.

Kim went to the police after that, told them his story. They admitted that the series of accidental deaths of prominent race track people had aroused their suspicions, too. But they had no real evidence to work with. They were powerless. Kim pleaded and begged them to do something, but in vain. He left them in a fury of frustration.

He approached other stable owners whose jockeys had been killed from time to time in a similar manner. They paled as soon as he brought the subject up. They wouldn't discuss it, pretended they didn't even know what he was talking about. He couldn't break them down. They were scared stiff.

Right after that, Kim got another call. This time Mr. Betts said: "Kim, I hear you've been trying to find out about me. That's bad policy, Kim. You might get me angry. You wouldn't want to do that. Lay off that stuff."

There wasn't much Kim could do. It was like fighting blind against a man who could see. Mr. Betts had every advantage. He was devilishly clever, made no mistakes. He broke Kim down. The next time he called Kim said through his teeth:

"All right, damn you, what do you want me to do?"

It was very simple, Mr. Betts told him. All he had to do was see that his horse, Merribelle, favorite for the Metropolitan Handicap, didn't win. Kim said he'd see what he could do about it. He said, too, that some day he'd find the man at the other end of that wire and make a little payoff.

Mr. Betts laughed at that and told Kim that he was a card.

Tommy Lamont, Kim's ace rider, was scheduled to ride Merribelle. Kim knew it wasn't in Tommy to throw a race no matter what, even if he believed Kim's story, understood, even if it meant saving his own life. So Kim couldn't take a chance on him. He changed jockeys. He got a kid called O'Neal, who had been an apprentice boy for a long, long time, who had been in trouble with racing officials several times but never had anything pinned on him. Kim made O'Neal a proposition and the kid took it.

The last minute switch in jockeys didn't affect the odds of Merribelle. The fans and professional handicappers thought it was a trick on Kim's part to increase the odds. A really outstanding horse could win a race if he had a wooden dummy on his back. So Merribelle went off a bigger favorite than had been expected. O'Neal did a fine job. The horse came in third. There was a howl and some booing from the stands after the race when the jocks came back to the enclosure to weigh in. But that was all. Nobody really suspected anything. They just thought Kim's strategy had backfired and O'Neal had hammed up the ride.

THAT NIGHT Kim got another call from Mr. Betts, who was very pleased. He congratulated Kim on his good judgment. He didn't seem concerned that Kim had lost a thirty thousand dollar purse—and his self respect.

After that call, Kim Magee went out and got roaring drunk. He stayed that way for three days. His girl, Connie Lamont, sister of the jockey, found him and brought him home and sobered him up. But that was the beginning of the end for the Magee stables.

Kim tried to stop Mr. Betts by not racing his top horses, by only running his platers in races out of their class where they would be long shots. But Mr. Betts didn't let him get away with this. Mr. Betts started

telling him which horses to run and in which races. He knew the business, too. When Kim balked at this, Mr. Betts changed Kim's mind by killing off a couple of men connected with Kim's stable, an exercise boy name of Amundson and a trainer named Kittleman. Kim did as he was told after that. There were no questions on the part of the police about the deaths of those two men, either. They were "accidents", pure and simple, to everybody but Kim. Amundson was run down by a car, was supposed to have leaped in front of it, in midtown traffic. Kittleman was kicked to death by an unruly horse. Week by week, the ordeal took its toll of Kim Magee. He grew thin and nervous. He couldn't eat, nor sleep. He grew grouchy and irritable with the stable help. He drank more and more heavily. Connie Lamont the girl he loved and was supposed to marry, tried to help him, tried to save him for himself, but one night, drunk and half crazy, he picked a fight with her. He'd been pretty rough and called off their engagement. That was the last he saw of Connie. The next day, her brother, Tommy, broke his contract to ride with the Kim Magee stable. A few months later, Connie married a small-time stable owner named Dick Hastings. That just about finished it.

All this time, Kim had been working to try and track down Mr. Betts, learn his true identity. There were so many people it could be, it was a gigantic task and he had no success. There were at least a dozen big time bookies who hung around the track. It could be any of them. The city—and Jersey, just across the river—was full of them, big time and small. With nothing to work on, it was like looking for a needle in a haystack.

During this time, even while he was forced to play ball with Mr. Betts. Kim enlisted the aid of two other men. One was Fritz Muller, who had been with Kim's stable for years. He knew the racing business inside and out, had been a leading jockey in his day and when he'd got-

ten old and gone over the weight, had gone into the training end of the business. He was an old man and wise and Kim knew he could be trusted.

The other man Kim went to, was Jack Riker, a cartoonist who did a comic strip for the *Racing World Daily*, featuring Ike and Mike, a couple of characters who followed the races around the country from track to track and made gags and wise-cracks, had sundry silly adventures. Riker devoted one panel of his strip to racing circles gossip and to giving out tips to his followers. He was known as a sharp handicapper and a champion of the fans. He continually fought the crooked elements in racing and praised owners and trainers he knew to be honest. He'd long been a friend of Kim's.

But even these two powerful figures of turfdom couldn't root out Mr. Betts. After awhile, Fritz Muller began to brood over Kim's trouble with Mr. Betts, knowing his boss was going slowly broke by not winning any big purses. He worked himself into a nervous breakdown over it and had to go away for awhile.

THE NEXT Spring, Mr. Betts made a bad break. In one of his phone calls to Kim, he used the expression: "Don't talk like somebody sick in the head." The expression rang a familiar note in Kim's memory. There was a well known track bookie, who had made a reputation the last year or so, for not refusing to take any bet, no matter how big. He habitually used that expression, when irritated by someone disagreeing with him.

Kim let the conversation continue for another moment or so, then whispered: "Listen, I can't talk any more right now. Somebody's coming into the room. Call me back about eleven, tonight. I'll be here alone." Then he hung up.

For a long moment, Kim stood, staring at the phone, his fists clenching and unclenching at his sides, a pulse beating wildly in his throat.

"Kristenson," he said. "Arch Kristenson." He kept saying the name over and over.

It wasn't much to go on, it was only a little thing and he might be all wrong. Mr. Betts might have just picked up the expression somewhere; he'd never used it before over the phone. But at least it was something Kim could check, now.

That night, Kim drove over to Kristenson's apartment in a swanky East River section. He parked and watched for the bookmaker to come out. About five to eleven, he saw Kristenson's short, stocky figure emerge from the building and get into a cab. Kim followed in his own car. At eleven o'clock, a few blocks away, Arch Kristenson got out of the cab and entered a drug store.

Kim parked his own car nearby and walked swiftly toward the drug store. He stood outside for a few moments, watching Kristenson stop at the soda fountain and drink a bromide. A drizzling rain had by now turned into a light fog that hung around the street lamps and hazed the neon signs of the small shops up and down the street. Kim stood, peering in through the drug store window, the wet clamminess of the night chilling him despite the fever of excitement sweating up his whole body.

He waited until Kristenson's dumpy figure squeezed into one of a row of phone booths, then Kim rushed into the store. He slid into an adjoining booth. He listened to the clicking of the dial but couldn't catch the number. But he heard the muffled voice from the next booth, say: "I'd like to speak to Mr. Kim Magee, please.... He isn't.... That's strange. He definitely told me to call at—"

That was all Kim wanted to hear. He stepped out of his own booth, looked into the next one. He saw Kristenson, hunched over the phone, a handkerchief covering the mouth-piece. A great roaring came into Kim's ears.

Kristenson slammed the receiver back onto the hook, stuck the handkerchief into his breast pocket and

stepped out of the booth. He didn't see Kim, right away. Kim grabbed the short, stocky man's beefy shoulder, spun him around.

Arch Kristenson had straight thick black hair and a flashy, square-jawed face. His eyes were green, pouched between layers of fat. He was shorter than average, coming only to Kim's chin but he was powerfully built. His mouth gaped and his green eyes popped in surprise when he saw Kim.

"Magee," he cried. "What are you doing here?" The flush went out of his meaty face. "I—uh—I was just playing a little gag on a friend." He laughed, nervously. "You know—pretending I was somebody else. I—"

HE NEVER finished the explanation. All the anger, all the torture that Kim Magee had gone through the past six months boiled over inside of him. He swung his fist in wild, blind fury at Kristenson's fat face.

The other man was fast, agile, for his bulk. He ducked and Kim's fist riffled through his dark hair. Kim reached for him, then, but Kristenson swiveled away from Kim's clutching fingers, ran toward the front of the store and the door.

A soda jerk, behind the counter, in the process of pouring a milk shake into a glass, stared goggle-eyed at the two men and poured the shake into the lap of a middle aged woman sitting at the fountain. She screamed. The druggist yelled: "What is this? What's going on?"

Kristenson slammed on out through the door onto the street, Kim a few feet behind him. Kim nailed him in a flying tackle just before Kristenson reached his cab. Then Kim scrambled to his feet and as Kristenson got up, Kim walloped him with a solid right uppercut. He caught Kristenson's squat figure before it fell. He bent and slung the unconscious man over his shoulder. He told the staring cabby: "Friend of mine. He goes nuts. He takes fits. I got to get him back to the hospital."

He lugged Kristenson to his own

car, dumped him in the back. He got behind the wheel and sped away from the scene just as the cabby and the people in the drug store set up a holler for the police.

Some of the anger was out of Kim, now, as he drove down one side street and up another to throw off any possible pursuit. There was none, though, the rear view mirror told him. It had all happened too swiftly and there had been no policeman nearby.

Now that Mr. Betts was his prisoner, Kim wasn't sure just what he could do with him. He had no absolute proof, no evidence that would stand up in court, that Kristenson was Mr. Betts. In desperation, he decided to take the unconscious man out to his own house, make him a temporary prisoner there. Then he would call some of the other stable owners who had been victimized by Mr. Betts, tell them that he was positive that he had caught the man who had been forcing them all to throw races, who had caused the murders of so many jockeys. Maybe, together, all of Mr. Betts' victims could break him down to confess or put together bits of evidence against Kristenson that would prove his guilt, conclusively.

Kim swung his sedan over toward the East Side and headed downtown. On the approach to the bridge, the fog hung low and thick so that it was difficult to drive. There was little traffic heading toward the Queens side. Kim drove slowly, the occasional light of a car on the other side, a dull yellow haze. Every few minutes, he glanced back over his shoulder, made sure that Kristenson was still unconscious. There was no sign of life from the back seat.

Halfway across the bridge, there was a sudden movement back there. Quickly, Kim jammed on the brakes, pulled to one side. But he wasn't quick enough. Kristenson had come to. He yanked open the door and tumbled out just as the car jolted to a sudden halt. Kim leaped after the fat man, landed on top of him. For

a moment, they rolled over and over, pummeling madly. Then Kristenson got to his feet. Kim lunged for him again and at the last minute ducked just as Mr. Betts swung at his head with a long straight razor, its blade glittering wickedly in the dull backwash of light from the car's headlights.

They closed together again, grappling. Somehow, Kim got hold of Kristenson's right arm, prevented another blow with that deadly razor. The short fat man was battling with maniacal strength, now, the shine of his green eyes as murderous as a panther's. His breath came in harsh, stentorous gasps.

SUDDENLY, KIM got a grip on Kristenson's arm twisted it until the razor slipped free and dropped to the ground. Kim snatched it up. Just as he straightened up again, Kristenson swung a vicious, round-house blow. It never landed. Kim put up his arm to defend himself and Kristenson, lunging in, got the open blade of the razor across his throat. Kristenson made a crazy, gurgling noise and Kim stepped back, aghast. He watched a thin thread of crimson across Kristenson's throat, spread downward until the whole collar of his shirt and then the bosom of the shirt, itself, was stained with blood.

Kristenson screamed: "You'll never take me alive!" and staggered toward the bridge rail. He pulled himself up and over it, disappeared. The thin sound of his wailing was muffled and lost in the heavy fog that hung like dirty gray cotton over the water. Somewhere below, a tugboat hooted.

Kim stood, hardly breathing, looking down at the razor and splashes of blood on the road. He turned and staggered back into his car. Behind him, a police whistle shrilled. Kim got the motor started, slipped the sedan into gear and sped away, motor racing. In the dark and the fog, he got away before the Bridge police knew what had happened, even.

But that fight on the bridge finished Kim. He went home and got

roaring drunk. He stayed that way for a week but it didn't do any good. He couldn't eat, he couldn't sleep. He couldn't get the sight of Kristenson's pale, fat, terrified face after his throat had been cut out of his mind. He couldn't get the sound of Kristenson's muffled screams as he leapt from the bridge out of his ears. That scene was the straw that broke the camel's back. Kim went to pieces completely. On top of the year of terror under the spell of Mr. Betts, that was too much for him.

The strange part was that there was never any attention in the papers of Arch Kristenson's death, of his body being found. There was an item to the effect that his wife had notified the police that he was "missing" but that was all. It caused some small talk in racing circles but was soon forgotten.

Kim talked it over with Fritz Muller and Jack Riker. They both agreed that he shouldn't take his story to the police but to let the matter rest. It was only justice, they said. Kristenson had it coming, they said. They tried to straighten Kim up but he was too far gone. He lost interest in his stables and everything else. The stables went to pot and he was finally forced to sell them. Kim felt as though his mind was slipping and his health was just about ruined. He went to an eminent psychiatrist and told him the whole story.

The psychiatrist told him that he was really in a bad state and that the only thing that could save him was to get away, for a good long while, from everything connected with his former life. Go to another city, make new friends, get some kind of a quiet, easy job that would occupy his mind, forget racing.

He did that. For three years, away from it all, in Chicago, Kim fought his memories of the terror that was Mr. Betts. He had licked it, he thought. He had come back. And now, in some fantastic, macabre way, it was all starting over again, the first few minutes he was back in New York or else somebody was riding him....

OUTSIDE Grand Central, now, Kim hailed a cab. He just had time to grab a bite to eat, check in at a hotel near Penn Station and get out to the Long Island track before the first race and talk with Tommy Lamont. Tommy was riding a heavy favorite in the Third today and it looked like a good thing to Kim. He could use a little ready cash to be picked up on a good bet, too. But he wanted to talk to Tommy about it, first, if he could.

The cab moved slowly through the Forty Second Street traffic. As it approached Fifth Avenue, it stopped behind a long line of traffic. Up ahead, horns were blowing, indignantly. The line was stopped cold. It didn't move. After two or three minutes, the cabbie turned and said: "Looks like we're stuck, mister. Must have been an accident or something."

Kim waited another couple of minutes and then handed the driver a half dollar. "I'll get out and walk around this jam, get another cab on the other side of it," he said. "I'm in a hurry."

He joined the midday throngs on the sidewalk, pushed toward Fifth Avenue. The jam was so concentrated he could hardly worm through as he neared the corner. But he finally got up front, in the middle of the street. He saw an ambulance and two interns rolling a body onto the stretcher. He saw the checkered sport coat and the great bulbous nose of the corpse. He saw the battered wallet one of the cops was holding and recognized it.

Kim went up to the cop, asked what had happened. The cop told him. Kim was very pale. A nerve ticked at the hinge of his jaw. He knew now what the voice on the phone that had spoken to him in Grand Central meant when it said: "too bad about Fritz Muller." He knew now that he must be wrong about Mr. Betts being dead. The story the cop had told Kim, about how Fritz Muller just died, was the same that had been told about the death of Amundson, the exercise boy, four years ago. It had been called accidental death

then. It would be called that now, with Fritz Muller. There was no mistaking the casual, fool-proof, devilishly clever murder methods of Mr. Betts.

Somehow, the homicidal book-maker had survived that death plunge through the night mists into the East River. He had lived in spite of that and the fact that his throat had been cut almost from ear to ear. It was unbelievable but then so was the whole career of the fabulous Mr. Betts.

Pushing through the crowds Kim tried to think, to figure things out. The old aching back to his head and the pit of his stomach seemed to shrivel. For a moment, he was tempted to run wildly back to the Terminal and reserve a seat on the next train out—to any place that was far away. He didn't think that he could square off with Mr. Betts again. But he clenched his fists and fought off that temptation, moving fast away from the crowded crossing. He got into another hack and settled back. Gradually some of the fear washed out of him and anger took his place.

He had come back to New York to start off again, clean. He had a good job lined up as a handicapper and turf feature writer on one of the evening papers. He wasn't going to run away from Mr. Betts or anybody. Kim got out of the cab at the Hotel Pierpont, on Thirty Fourth, between Sixth and Seventh, a small, old fashioned hostelry that was popular with racing people during the New York season because of its proximity to the Long Island Railroad in Penn Station.

THE HOTEL WAS a narrow, twelve story building wedged in between taller office structures. There was no canopy over the front of it. Just as Kim started to walk from the cab toward the entrance, something whizzed and swished through the air about a foot from his shoulder. It hit the sidewalk with a terrible metallic clang and crash and pieces of metal flew in all directions.

Kim stood there, petrified and there were just enough pieces left together

in the tangled, smashed wreckage on the sidewalk for him to identify one of the small electric fans they used in the hotel rooms. If it had hit Kim right it would have killed him. It would have been an accident, of course. Somebody had set the thing one the window, for some fool reason and it had fallen out. But Kim knew it was not that way, really. There was a tiny white card near the wreckage of the fan. It was turned faced down and there was a piece of string still through a hole in the center of it where it had been tied to the fan. Kim didn't bother to pick it up the card and turn it over. He knew what it was. It would have a black silhouette of a race horse, ridden by a skeleton, on it, and the name Mr. Betts.

A small crowd had paused around Kim and the wreckage of the fan and were looking up the face of the hotel, looking for an opened window and and some sign of the person who had dropped the fan. They were all muttering indignantly. The doorman came up to Kim, solicitously and assured him that he'd have the manager check and find out which room the fan had fallen from. But Kim knew it wouldn't do much good. Mr. Betts and his workers always covered behind themselves pretty well. Whitelipped and shaken, he went on into the hotel desk, checked into the room he'd reserved a couple of weeks ago.

The room was on the Seventh Floor and at any other time, that would have seemed a good omen because seven was Kim's lucky number. But right now it didn't hit him that way. Not after the things that had happened the past half hour.

It was a small room, with a window that looked out onto an areaway. It had a private bath and was clean and neat. Kim unpacked hurriedly. When he came to the nickel plated .32 police Special, carefully wrapped in an old towel, he stood for some moments holding it in his hands.

At first, when he'd started packing, in Chicago, Kim had thought

about throwing the gun away. He'd figured he wouldn't need it any more. But at the last minute, he'd stuck it in his bag, anyhow. Now, he was glad. He unwrapped the towel from around it and dropped the gun into his jacket pocket. He finished putting away the rest of his clothes and the phone rang.

A deep, rich, young woman's voice said: "Kim?"

"That's right," he said. He held his breath. He fell as though his heart would stop. He hoped it was just his imagination. He didn't want the owner of that voice to be whom he thought it was.

"Kim, this is Connie. Remember?"

"Yes." He let his breath out. "Yes, I remember. I—what can I do for you, Connie?"

"Kim," she said, "why did you come back to New York? Why did you come?"

"Does there have to be a special reason?" he asked. "Let's say I got homesick. Let's just say New York is my town and I got a yen for it again and wanted to come back, to stay. I've got a job here, too. I'm going to be around awhile. What's wrong with that?"

There was silence for a moment, then Connie suddenly blurted: "Throw it over, Kim. Give up the job. Stay out of racing, completely and leave New —"

"Just a *minute*!" he cut her off. "One time you had a right to tell me what to do. Not any more. You—" He stopped. There was no sense in getting angry with Connie. It wasn't her fault that things had turned out the way they had.

"Kim," Connie said. "I—I'm not trying to butt into your business. I'm trying to help you—for—well, call it for old time's sake. I was told to warn you. He said you might pay some attention to me."

"Who said it?"

SHE PAUSED, then: "You know, Kim. You know who I mean. Please don't be smart alecky about

it. You had enough trouble before. Kim—Fritz Muller told me about it, after you went away. If you'd only told me, Kim, things might have been different. But, listen to me, now. You can't fight him, this time, Kim. He's bigger and stronger than ever. He controls practically all of racing, now."

"Wells, thanks for the warning, Connie," he said. "I'll think it over. But don't worry about me. I can take care of myself."

"That's what the others thought," she said. "That's what my husband, Dick, thought, too. You heard about Dick, didn't you, Kim?"

"No," he said. "No, I didn't."

"He's dead," Connie said softly. "He died in a stable fire down in Maryland about six months ago. He was trying to save a couple of the horses, they say. But you and I know it wasn't that. Dick wasn't the hero type. He wouldn't risk his life for any animal. Dick had tried to fight Mr. Betts, Kim."

"Look, can I see you for a while, tonight? Please, Connie. Maybe we can have a drink together, or something. Where are you living now?"

She gave him her address and pleaded with him once more to leave New York again and then hung up. Kim took a shower and left his room. Downstairs when he turned his key in at the desk, someone punched his arm, lightly. He turned and two men were standing there. One was short and stocky, bull-necked, with loping, gorilla-like shoulders and a red, meaty face. His eyes, set deep between beetling brows and dark pouches beneath them, were blue and sharp. He wore a modified Western style Stetson and expensive, sloppy looking tweeds. He grinned broadly, showing a row of gold back teeth.

"Kim Magee," he said in a booming voice. "Welcome back, kid. I hear you're going to pick 'em for The Star. It's about time I got a little competition."

Kim said, "Jack Riker, you old plug-ugly," and shook hands with the *Racing World Daily* cartoonist. "I

don't know how good I'm going to be at picking 'em. Being away for a few years, a guy gets rusty."

Jack Riker turned to the man who was with him. He was tall and very thin, with wavy blond hair and a pale, hairline mustache. He was dressed in a handsome royal blue sport jacket and maroon colored silk muffler wrapped high around his throat in place of a tie. His slate gray garbardine slacks held a razor crease. He wore heavy suede sport shoes. All in all, he looked like a Hollywood dandy or a high class tout.

"This is my boss, Kim," Jack said. "Layton McCall. He owns *Racing World Daily* now, bought it from Murtagh about six months ago." Riker gestured toward Kim. "Layt, meet Kim Magee, a swell guy from way back. Kim used to own one of the best and biggest stables in the East."

"**H**EARD A lot about you," McCall said. "If ever I can do anything for you, let me know." He glanced at his watch. "Look, if we're going to make that second race, today, we'd better get going. I've got a hired car outside, Magee. Can I give you a lift out to the track?"

"If you have room," Kim told him.

McCall waved his hand, deprecatingly. "Plenty. Just Riker and myself and you."

"You've got even more room than you think," Jack Riker put in. "I'm not going with you. Got something to take care of, first. I'll take the late train out. See you guys at the clubhouse bar." He reached over and took Kim's arm. "Drop up my place, tonight. Like to talk over *old times*." He accentuated the last words, winked. "You now what I mean? Don't make any bad *bets*!"

Kim's jaw tightened and he felt pulses begin to pound in his wrists. He said: "Wait a minute, Jack, I—" He broke off because Riker, with a wave of his hand, walked away. Kim had been going to say that he'd talk to him right now, that he could wait to go out to the track later, too. But Riker was gone.

Kim fought off an instinct to run after him. Riker had some information about Mr. Betts, wanted to discuss it with him. There was no mistaking the hidden meaning in his words.

McCall and Kim walked out through the small lobby of the hotel, then got into a big limousine, parked in front. The driver was a thin-faced man with close cropped gray hair. He guided the big car expertly through traffic and soon they were speeding through the tunnel and out along one of the Queens County parkways.

While they rode, Kim and McCall exchanged the formal small talk of casual acquaintances. McCall told him how he'd come to take over *Racing World Daily*. It seems that McCall had been sports editor of a newspaper on the Coast, who had always bet heavily on the races. He'd hit a lucky streak and come East with his winnings. Murtagh, who had owned the *Daily* for years, was getting old and ready to retire. He'd made McCall a good offer and the California man had bought the sheet.

"I thought you were new to racing here in the East," Kim said. "I didn't recognize you or your name."

MCCALL MADE no comment to that and a few moments later, a huge red truck, with no company name or any kind of identification, pulled up alongside of them to pass the limousine. He was going fast for a truck and for a few seconds he stayed right alongside, running at about the same speed as the car. Kim saw their driver look apprehensively at the truck. The road was not too wide at that point and the limousine had only about eighteen inches between it and the truck. All of a sudden, the limousine driver yelled:

"What in hell is that fool trying to—"

He never finished. The truck swerved over and sideswiped the limousine. The limousine driver jammed the brakes and cut to the right, away from the truck, toward a ditch on the side of the road. The right front wheel of the limousine

nosed over into the ditch and Kim was thrown over on top of McCall but neither of them were seriously hurt. The truck, meanwhile, swerved back on its course, rocked a little and sped away.

McCall's thin face was very pale. He picked nervously at his slender little mustache. "I—I don't understand it," he stammered. "Why—why would anybody want to do a thing like that? Why, a few more inches and that truck would have smashed us good. We—why—we might have all been killed, easily."

"Yeah," Kim said. He thought: And the fact that two innocent people would have died as well as himself wouldn't have bothered Mr. Betts at all. It would have just been another unfortunate "accident". He's certainly out to get me, this time.

At the track, just before they went into the clubhouse, McCall said he'd see Kim later. He wanted to go up into the press boxes and talk with one of the reporters up there. Kim went around to the jockey's quarters and asked to see Tommy Lamont. The attendant told him that Tommy had been forced to cancel all his mounts for the afternoon, and had just been taken to the hospital. He had been taken suddenly and violently sick right after lunch.

Kim went to the clubhouse stands and looked over the programs and the odds on the tote board, made a small bet for the sport of it, on the Third race, and lost. At the bar, afterward, he ran into Jack Riker, who had just got there. He started right away to question Jack about the pointed remarks he'd made back in the hotel lobby. But Riker wouldn't discuss it there. He said there were too many ears around. He insisted that Kim wait and come around to his apartment, that night and he'd tell him the whole story. He did remark, though, that he thought he'd just about "treed the coon."

Kim told him about the near-serious accident on the way out to the track and the hotel fan that had been dropped out the window in an attempt to brain him. When he fin-

ished, Riker was pale and perspiring. He said:

"I know, Kim and to tell you the truth, I'm scared silly, all the time. This guy plays for keeps and if he ever finds out how close I am on his tail..."

Kim asked Riker if he'd ever heard anything more about the "disappearance" of Arch Kristenson and what had happened to the bookmaker's big business after that. Riker said: "I can answer part of that. Come with me."

HE LED KIM outside and pointed down in front of the stands at the concrete apron that led down to the rail at the track. A tall, stylishly dressed woman, with flaming red hair done up in a tight bun at the nape of her neck, was standing talking with a small group of men.

"Kristenson's business is still being carried on," Riker said, pushing his big Stetson back on his head. "That big, beautiful carrot-top down there is Mrs. Lola Kristenson. She took over Arch's business. And made a good thing of it, too. She's cleaning up."

Kim and Riker were standing alone, now and Kim couldn't hold back his impatience. He said: "Nobody's around, right now, slip me some of the dope, anyhow. What goes?"

Jack Riker looked around quickly, lowered his voice. He said: "Well, a few months ago, Kim, I began to get wind that Mr. Betts had come back into operation after being away over two years, since that night you and he had a set-to on the bridge. I watched the race results and dropped a quiet word here and there and got reactions that told me I was right, that it was practically a fact. Since then, I've been working on it. The way it looks to me is that Kristenson survived that fall from the bridge and the razor cut on his throat could have been superficial. But since you identified him that night, and for all he knows, might have told a couple of other people, he can't put in an appearance. The way I see it, he must be holed up in hiding somewhere and

is working behind the scenes, pulling strings. I figure that sometime, somewhere, he'll contact his wife, Lola. I've been having her watched on the QT, day and night. I've found..."

Riker stopped abruptly and talking quite loudly, said: "I don't agree with you, Kim. I don't see Pelican Boy as having a chance in the Future."

Kim looked around just as Layton McCall came up to them. Kim nodded to him, said: "I'll have to leave you guys, now. Tommy Lamont's in the hospital and I want to get over there and find out what it's all about. See you later, Jack."

He went back out to the jockey's quarters and found out that Tommy had been taken to a hospital in Jamaica. Outside the racing park, Kim hired a hack to take him into Jamaica. But he couldn't get in to see Tommy. He was told that the jockey's condition was serious. That as far as they knew, he was suffering from some kind of food poisoning and that he was getting every care available. They hadn't been able to locate his sister yet, to notify her. She wasn't at home.

AFTER THAT, Kim headed back to New York, went to the offices of *The Star* and met his new boss, was introduced to some of the staff and was assigned a desk in the sports department. It was late in the afternoon when he got back to the hotel. He found company in his room.

Kim saw him the minute he walked in. He was sitting on the bed, facing the door. He was a skinny little runt of a guy, with sprouty, straw colored hair and a young, boyish face. He wore a light gray suit, with enormous maroon plaids on it, great padded shoulders and a pink carnation in the lapel button hole. His tie was shimmering silk, with a picture of a voluptuous blonde mermaid painted on it. He wore pointy, spit-polished yellow shoes and from his thin nervous hands, between his knees, dangled a pearl gray Stetson, with a huge snap-brim. He kept twirling it around and around be-

HAPPY DEATHDAY TO YOU

tween his fingers.

But the skinny little guy's eyes didn't go with his otherwise boyish face, nor his mouth either. His eyes looked like somebody had poured dirty gray dishwater into empty sockets and it had frozen there. They didn't move, didn't blink. The mouth was small and pursed as though he was waiting for someone to kiss him.

Kim slammed the door behind him, walked halfway across the room toward him and stopped, hands on hips. "What are you selling?" Kim wanted to know. It was just a formality, though. He thought he knew. He was only surprised at the dimin-

The creature on the bed opened his mouth and revealed tiny, pointed yellow teeth in his own split second version of a smile.

"You were told to leave town, Magee," he said. His voice was slightly high pitched and sing-songy, without expression. "I was sent to see that you do that, show you how it ain't healthy here for you."

Kim Magee grinned and worked his shoulders a little, loosening the muscles. He watched the little hood stand up and he made it about five feet two, with the aid of the elevated shoes he was wearing. He watched the other man take a roll of pennies from his pocket, toss them up in the air with his left hand, catch them with the right and wrap his fist around them.

Then two arms like hamhocks slipped under Kim's and came up around the back of his neck, fastening there in a full-nelson, throwing him forward, forcing him to bend his head. Kim cursed and struggled to get free but couldn't. He was slipping, all right. It had never even occurred to him that there might have been another one of them hiding behind the door as he opened it. Well, there had been and this was a hell of a time to think about it.

Just then, the little goon's fist, wrapped around the roll of pennies, exploded against Kim's face. It landed on his cheekbone right under the eye. He shook his head and looked

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through blurred eyes at the man who had hit him.

"Aw, Arthur," the hoarse voice of the man holding Kim from behind, said: "You don't want to be so gentle with him. None of those love taps. What's a-matter, you don't love your work no more? You gettin' stale?"

Arthur ignored his friend. He looked at Kim, grinning. "Well, why don't you say what you were thinking, before?" he demanded. "Why don't you ask me how come they send a boy on a man's errand? Go ahead. Please say it. Everybody says it when they first see me. It makes me nice and mad. I can do a better job."

KIM LUNGED, kicked back with his heel and almost broke away. Arthur fell back with a squeal of fright, yelling: "Watch him, Bones. Don't let him get away."

In the dresser mirror, Kim could now see Bones. He was a gorilla of a man, with the neck and shoulders and bullet-head of a professional wrestler. The arms that held Kim felt like oak logs. Kim was afraid there wasn't much chance of Bones letting him get away. Then he looked up again just as Arthur threw another punch.

This one must have been a round house swing and it caught Kim flush on the temple, almost tore his head from his shoulders. For a little man, Arthur packed a wallop, especially with the rolled pennies filling his fist. Kim's ears rang and roared and he couldn't see for a minute. He suddenly let himself go limp, all over, sag in Bones' arms. He stayed that way, even when Arthur hit him again, this time, right between the eyes. He acted as though he didn't even feel it. That was hard, too. The punch almost made scrambled eggs of his brains.

"Bah!" Arthur said, in a temper. "He can't take it, Bones. He's out already. I must be getting good. I'll have to watch that. I don't like them to go to sleep so quick. It isn't any fun."

"Should I let him go?" Bones asked. "Is he really out?"

"Like a lamp," Arthur said. "Drop him on the rug. I'll give him a little shoe treatment."

Kim felt the huge arms around his neck loosen the grip. He let himself fall limply to the floor. He squinted one eye open and saw Arthur pull back his pointed yellow shoe for a free-boot. When the foot swung, Kim rolled over and grabbed Arthur's slender ankle and pushed up with all his strength. With his other hand, Kim pulled the .32 from his pocket. He scrambled to his feet as Arthur went crashing to the floor on his back.

Bones was fumbling for a shoulder rig gun when Kim swung the .32 by the barrel. The flat of the butt caught Bones across his Neanderthal jaw and the big man screamed with pain and put his hand to the injured part. Kim gave him another treatment in the same place and broke a couple of Bones' sausage-like fingers. The next swing of the pistol came down across the top of Bones' bulging forehead. The wrestler's eyes crossed and his mouth sagged loosely. He half turned around and walked away from it all on rubber leg. He walked right into the telephone table, knocked it over and fell in a heap on top of it.

Kim turned to Arthur, who was getting to his feet, tugging at his back pocket, his pinched little face twisted in fear. Kim grabbed Arthur's other arm, twisted it around, snatched a baby automatic from Arthur's hand as he took it from his pocket. Kim tossed the gun onto the bed and went to work on Arthur with the flat of his hands. He slapped him all the way across the room, whiplash blows that crazed the skinny little gunman with pain. He drove him up against a wall and sunk one fist into Arthur's puny middle. He pushed the other one into Arthur's mouth and some of Arthur's teeth and quite a bit of his blood was suddenly on the floor. He collapsed into the middle of the mess.

Someone knocked on the door and Kim opened it to a derby-hatted house detective with puffy cheeks and a walrus type mustache. The

HAPPY DEATHDAY TO YOU

house dick wanted to know what was going on in there. Kim told him:

"You're a little late for the kissing games but you can take a couple of the girls home. Come in."

The house detective stepped into the room and goggled at the two unconscious strong-arm boys on the floor. Kim went into the lavatory and stripped to the waist, soaked his cheek and eyes with cold water. While he did that, he told what had happened but offered no explanation for the visit. The house dick went to the phone and called the police. A few minutes later, a couple of squad car men came up and carried out Bones and Arthur. Kim told his story again, without mentioning anything about Mr. Betts having sent them and they all went out and left him alone.

HE LEFT a call with the desk down stairs to be awakened at seven thirty and fell on the bed for a nap. It had been a long time since he'd had a workout like that. It had taken it out of him. He soaked a towel in ice water and wrapped it around his puffed face.

He awakened, feeling not too bad and was pleasantly surprised to notice that his face was not swollen and there was only the suggestion of a mouse under one eye. He put it down to the fact that Arthur must have had very soft hands. Then, Kim went down into the grill room, had supper and cabbled to Jack Riker's place on a Village side street.

Riker's apartment was in a remodeled tenement with a sickening imitation stucco job daubing up the outside of it. He rang the downstairs bell and since the vestibule door wasn't locked, went in and started up the stairs. Riker lived on the third floor, front apartment. Climbing up the stairs, Kim looked at the kid's chalk scrawlings on the dirty wall, watched two fat, healthy looking roaches race each other along a crack in the plaster. He listened to the sounds of life from the other flats, a kid playing the notes of the scale on a tenor sax, over and over, two babies squalling a discordant duet and a man

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and his wife swearing at each other in three different languages.

But Kim wasn't paying much attention to any of that. He was thinking that he really must have Mr. Betts worried. The murdering bookie was now in desperation, resorting to very obvious and crude methods, which wasn't like him at all. The only reason Kim could think of, was that Mr. Betts was scared and rattled silly. Kim had gotten his number once and he was afraid that he might do it again. He was taking no chances. He was getting Kim out of the city if it was at all possible.

There was one thing about it that sobered Kim, some, took away some of his elation. Mr. Betts had never gone in for direct, obvious methods of murder. But he soon would. Kim had been lucky in avoiding the accidental deaths he had cooked up for him, so far. But siccing two hired strong boys onto him, indicated a new trend in Mr. Betts methods. Kim figured that the next thing to expect would be an out-and-out attempt on his life. That was a difficult thing to dodge. A heavy metal fan dropped from ten flights up, might miss. An auto accident might not come off just right. But a hired, coked up gunman, out to shoot you in the back, was something else again.

Kim's one hope was that tonight he and Jack Riker might get their heads together and with information Jack had already dug up, maybe they could root Mr. Betts out of his hiding place.

HHE KNOCKED on the door of Jack's apartment and it opened a few inches under the pressure of his fist. Inside a radio was blaring out hot jazz. Kim walked in, down a short hall and came out into Jack's huge studio living room. The radio was in here and the blast of it was almost deafening.

It was like a hundred other furnished Greenwich Village flats. There were dingy tapestries on the wall and pictures of racing celebrities, horses that had won big stake races in the past. One was a picture

of Kim, himself, standing next to one of his champion two year olds. There was an odd assortment of furniture but it was the desk that caught Kim's attention.

Jack Riker was sitting there, his short, husky figure leaning way over a typewriter on the desk, as though looking closely at something he had just written. He didn't look around when Kim came in. He couldn't have heard him enter and with the noise the radio was making, Kim doubted that he'd even heard the bell. He wondered how Jack could write with such a din.

Kim walked over and snapped the radio off. The sudden silence was a shock. Other sounds became magnified. The drip of a faucet in the kitchen, the whirring of an electric clock over the fireplace mantle, the sound of Kim's own breathing.

"What do you say, Jack?" Kim greeted.

Jack Riker didn't pivot around on his typing chair. He didn't move. Kim walked over and put his hand on the newspaper cartoonist's broad shoulder. Jack Riker toppled slowly sideway out of his chair onto the floor. He lay there, looking up at Kim, with his eyes and mouth wide open and a surprised look on his face which no longer looked red and meaty but was the color of dirty bath water. The surprised look stayed right there. It would always be there, right along with the black bullet hole, still oozing a rusty-red ribbon of blood, in Jack Riker's temple.

On the desk, Kim saw, was an old fashioned Smith And Wesson .32 revolver. Kim had an idea Jack Riker's fingerprints would be on the handle and trigger. It was rigged up very nicely as a suicide but Kim didn't swallow it. In the second place, this was earmarked Mr. Betts, all over.

"You got too close on the trail, didn't you, Jack?" Kim asked the corpse. He felt filled with frustration. Whatever Jack had learned, was locked up forever now, within his dead brain. Just to make sure, Kim went quickly through the papers on Jack's desk and in the drawer of the

HAPPY DEATHDAY TO YOU

desk. He found nothing. He hadn't really expected to. The killer had probably done that, too. Kim had an idea that in this instance, it had been Mr. Betts, himself. He wouldn't leave such an important victim to an hireling.

Just then the telephone rang. The bell was slightly muffled but even so, its jangling got on Kim's tautened nerves. He jumped and swiveled toward the sound. The instrument was set on a bookcase, over near the window. For a long moment, Kim couldn't decide whether or not to answer it. Finally, he walked over and picked up the phone, holding it in his handkerchief.

Before he could say "hello," even, a familiar muffled voice said: "Good evening, Kim. Say a little prayer for Jack for me, will you. He was a good Joe, as they say."

Kim didn't say anything. He just stood there, breathing hard and fast, looking out through the window, down onto the street. He watched a fellow and girl in the shadows on the stoop of an old brownstone house, across the street, making love. He watched a cop down near the corner, hit the call box. The voice went on in his ear.

"I guess my boys didn't make out so well with you up in your room, did they? Bumbling fools! I don't know why I ever allowed myself to go in for strong arm tactics, anyhow. I should have known better. I hope they didn't hurt you, Kim."

"Not bad," Kim said, softly. "I bruise easily but I haven't got any screen tests lined up for tomorrow. Don't worry about it. But I want you to know I'm getting a little sick of all this. Tonight I got a little touched-off about it. I'm really going after you, Mr. Betts, now."

"I wouldn't get hasty, Kim," the voice said. "Except about leaving town. That's what you're going to do, you know. That's what I called you about. Because I think you still have a warm spot in your heart for Connie Lamont. I don't think you'd like her to get hurt. I had to use her brother, Tommy, today, as a warn-

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(Continued From Page 123)

ing to the man he works for, not to try and buck me. You wouldn't want me to make that a family affair, Kim?"

Kim held his breath until it hurt in his throat. He felt as though a mailed fist had gotten a grip around his heart. He said: "You haven't got Connie. You wouldn't dare!"

"I wouldn't bet on that, Kim. You still have time to make that ten p. m. train. If my man doesn't report you boarding it, Connie Lamont will have a bad accident. To make sure you don't try and prevent that, I have Connie right here with me. You know I don't make idle threats, Kim."

THE PHONE went dead in Kim's ear then. He set it back in its cradle. He looked at his watch. It was a few minutes before nine o'clock. He had a little over an hour to either catch the train back to Chicago, as ordered, or find Arch Kristenson, still playing the role of Mr. Betts, and try and get Connie away from him. The latter choice was a tough order but Kim thought he'd have a crack at it. He could still make the train at the last moment, if he failed.

He went out of Jack Riker's flat fast, with a farewell flip of the fingers to his forehead, to the dead man. Out on the street, he hailed a hack and rode up to Arch Kristenson's old address, where Riker had told him, Kristenson's wife still lived in the same flat.

Kim didn't go into the ornate lobby, though. He went down a side alley and found a fire escape. He found an ash barrel and moved it under the escape, found that he could just make the bottom rung of the ladder, with a little leap. He jumped and swung his legs up and over that bottom rung, finally scrambled up onto the first landing. Crouched there, Kim took off his shoes and parked them on a corner of the escape. Then, silently, he mounted the iron stairs, past lighted windows, to the fifth floor, squatted there outside

a window of the Kristenson apartment.

It was the living room that looked out onto the fire escape. Kim could see two people in there. One was a woman, whom he recognized as Mrs. Kristenson. Her orange red hair shone in the light of a lamp. She was wearing a simple green dress, with short sleeves and the round flesh of her arms was very white. He couldn't see her face. She was sitting at a desk, pouring over a large ledger book.

Standing next to her was a man. His back was to the window but Kim could recognize the blue sport coat and lanky tall figure of Layton McCall, owner of *Racing World Daily*. A soft whistle broke from his lips.

It came to him that there was something wrong with the idea of the owner of a racing newspaper for fans, visiting with a woman who was a big time bookmaker. Especially when he saw McCall point to something in the ledger and Lola Kristenson looked up and laughed. She had a lovely, sharp chiseled profile, with thin dark brows. Her softly rounded cheeks were rougeless, the white skin contrasting strongly with the flaming red of her lipsticked mouth.

Then McCall turned away from the desk, walked to a cocktail table and picked up a cigarette from a box. He pulled a lighter from his pocket. He was facing the window now and in the bright flare of the lighter, Kim could see him, plainly, see his thin, drawn face with the blond brows and mustache, the wavy blond hair. Kim saw something else. McCall was not wearing the silk muffler wrapped around his neck. And in the lighter glow, Kim saw that there was a long, thin white scar across Layton McCall's throat.

Kim felt his heart thumping like an Indian tom-tom in his chest. Thoughts whirled wildly through his mind. He knew now why McCall wore that muffler—to hide the scar that had been made by a razor cut, that night, three years ago, when he, as Kristenson, alias Mr. Betts, had fought with Kim Magee.

HAPPY DEATHDAY TO YOU

THEN KIM'S stomach seemed to drop. It was no good. It was just a coincidence that McCall had such a scar, that he was up here with Kristenson's widow, going over her books. It didn't add up. In the first place, Kristenson had been very dark and fat and short. Of course, he could have had his hair and brows and mustache dyed. He could have reduced, taken off about fifty or sixty pounds and with the change in coloring it would be one of the hardest disguises in the world to penetrate. But the difference in height stopped Kim. Kristenson had been a good seven or eight inches shorter than McCall.

And Kim remembered this afternoon that McCall had been with him, when a truck had sideswiped the car in one of Mr. Bett's attempts to kill him. If McCall was Betts—Kristenson—he wouldn't have had such an attempt made on Kim's life while he was with him, endangering himself. Or would he? Kristenson would be just clever enough to cook up something like that in case Kim might have become suspicious of him, as McCall and Lola Kristenson stayed Kim off. Kim recalled now, that the trucks attempt to crack them up had been pretty crude, that it had been fumbled badly by the truck driver.

It still could tie-up, Kim thought, if only he could work out the difference in height of the two men. For about ten more minutes, he spied into the Kristenson living room. But McCall and Lola Kristenson stayed right at the desk, busy with the books. Nothing happened inside the flat that helped Kim.

Finally, he climbed back down the fire escape, put his shoes back on and dropped to the ground. He went around to the entrance of the building, took the self service elevator to the Fifth floor and rang the Kristenson bell.

Nobody answered for several minutes. Kim kept ringing. Finally the door was yanked open and Lola Kristenson stood there, glaring at him. She was a big woman, with wide, powerful shoulders and deep-

(Continued On Page 126)

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(Continued From Page 125)

bosomed. She was beautiful, too, in an Amazon like manner. Except that now, her red lips were drawn back from her teeth in temper and spots of color flamed on her cheekbones. Her green eyes flashed angrily.

"What is it?" she demanded. "I'm very busy. What do you want?"

"I want to talk to you, Mrs. Kristenson," Kim said. "It's rather important."

"Some other time," she said and started to shut the door in his face. "I told you, I'm too busy right now."

Kim put his foot out and stopped the door. He put his shoulder against it and slammed it wide open. Lola Kristenson fell back against the wall. Kim stepped past her into the hall. "You'll want to hear this," he said. "It's about your husband."

He heard a sharp gasp of breath behind him as he walked on into the living room. It was furnished expensively and in good taste. There was the faint smell of burned incense. There was nobody in the room. McCall had gotten out of sight, probably in one of the other rooms. Kim turned around to face Lola. She stood with her arms folded across her breast, looking him over, carefully. She still looked to be in a temper, but there was a flicker of curiosity and something like fear in her eyes, too.

"You've heard from my husband?" she said. "He—he's turned up somewhere? Who are you, a detective or something?"

"Not exactly," Kim said, answering all her questions at once. "Listen, tell your boy friend to come out and join the party. I'd like to talk to him, too."

She huffed up and started to protest but Kim stopped her. "Save it," he said. "Tell McCall to come out. I happen to know definitely that he's here."

SHEEPISHLY, blinking from having been in a darkened room, Layton McCall came out. He stood awkwardly, scuffing the rug with the side of his foot, an embarrassed grin on his face. "Hello, Magee," he

said. "What's the idea?" He gestured toward the room where he'd been hiding. "Lola and I have to be careful, you know. She's still legally married to Kristenson. We have another few years before the Enoch Arden law takes effect and frees her. But I'm sure you're gentleman enough to keep quiet about this."

"Wait a minute," Lola Kristenson said, sharply. "Something's wrong with this picture? How did he know you were here? What's he here for, anyhow?"

"Something's definitely wrong," Kim agreed. "For one thing the owner and publisher of *Racing World Daily* helping a known book-maker go over her accounts. It doesn't smell nice at all."

All the while he was talking, Kim kept staring at McCall's legs. There was something wrong about them and suddenly it came to him. They were unusually long for his body, so that he seemed always a little off balance, as though he might be on stilts, almost. That did it. Kim got the whole picture, then.

He put his hand in his pocket, backed off so that he could watch both McCall and Lola at the same time. He took the .32 Police Special from his pocket, flicked off the safety. "Once again, Mr. Betts," Magee said to McCall. "Or should I call you Kristenson? You have so many names, now."

The tall, blond man's brows went up. All color drained from his face. "What in the devil are you talking about, Magee?" he demanded. "Are you drunk? I don't—"

"Skip it, Arch," Lola cut in. "Save the bluff. I told you we should have quit, long ago. But you had to be greedy, didn't you. Well, you see what it's got you. You should have killed this young punk the minute he stepped off the train."

"You two are well mated," Kim said. He spoke coolly enough but his insides were working like a Kentucky still. His legs felt weak as water. A variety of emotions shook him like a fever and he was sweating and chilled at the same time. He was riled with anger, remembering the

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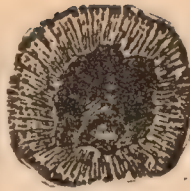
deaths of Fritz Muller and Jack Riker, today. Remembering the attempts on his own life and the poisoning of Tommy Lamont. Remembering the three years of hell while he fought to bring back to his mind the sanity this man had caused him to partially lose. Fear held him, too. Fear that he might muff this chance to square matters. To quiet his nerves, he talked. He said:

"Let me put it together, Kristenson. Let's see how good I am. The razor cut on the throat is easy. It was a superficial wound. So is the dying of the hair and the loss of weight. The latter could be from dieting or from a terrible shock to your system, suffered that night we fought on the bridge."

HE PAUSED, took a deep breath and went on. "I remember a tugboat hooting, right after you jumped. Let us say you were picked up. You weren't quite dead. You layed up somewhere and you recovered. Your legs were smashed, though, in the fall to the water, weren't they, Kristenson? They were amputated. You're wearing artificial limbs, now, longer than your own legs were by some inches, to give you extra height. That completes about one of the most perfect disguises I've ever heard of."

Kristenson's cheeks sucked in and a vein worked out, diagonally across his high forehead. His lips bared across his teeth, like animals. "Yes," he said. "You've got it pretty much, Magee. You didn't kill me that night. You won't get me, this time either. A barge captain fished me out of the East River, that night. It cost me nearly fifty thousand dollars to take care of him and his crew and the drunken old doctor they got for me, to keep it all quiet. But it was worth it. They did a good job. It would have all worked out fine. I came back as McCall. In another few years I would have remarried Lola, in that name and everything would have been exactly as it was before. In the meantime, we were getting along swell. But you had to come back and spoil things, didn't you, Magee?"

(Continued On Page 128)



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(Continued From Page 127)

"Where's Connie Lamont?" Kim demanded. "Is she here?"

Lola spoke up and Kim flickered his glance toward her. She looked like some statuesque, evil Valkyrie, standing there, arms folded. She was smiling at him, only her eyes stayed cold and threw off highlights from the lamp on the table. They were long and slightly slanting under her dark, winged brows. Her complexion was dead white against the blood-red of her lips, skinned back over sharp looking teeth.

"We'll swap you," she said. "Connie isn't here. But we can send you to where she is. We'll swap you Connie's life for our freedom."

"I'm making the deals," Kim told her. He swung the gun toward her, slightly. "Don't give me any of that talk. You tell me where Connie is or I'll kill both of you, right here in your own front parlor!" His eyes narrowed until they were only slits of reflected light between their lids. The hinges of his jaws were white with knotted muscle and there was something in the tone of his voice that was like ice clinking in a glass. "You don't think I won't? I'll give you about three seconds to talk."

Lola Kristenson suddenly screamed: "Don't, Arch! Don't be a fool! He'll kill you!"

It was too much for Kim. The tension in him shattered. He swung the gun back to Arch Kristenson, his finger tightening on the trigger. The .32 bucked and made its thunder sound in the room. But Kristenson had twisted out of the way the moment his wife yelled. Kim missed him. Before he could squeeze another shot out of the gun, Lola leapt toward him, kicked the revolver flying from his hand.

Kristenson pulled a gun from his own pocket, then. He trained it on Kim, who was standing there, straddle legged cursing himself, holding his numbed wrist. Kristenson said, through his teeth:

"This room is soundproofed, Magee, so don't get excited. Nobody heard that shot. Nobody'll be coming to help you out." He walked slowly

toward Kim. "The funny part is," he said, grinning, triumphantly, "that Connie is right here in this apartment. She's in one of the bedrooms, tied up. But I can give you a chance to see her, Magee. You're going to be a little job for my friend, the barge captain. He knows where the river is deep, and I imagine, how to make sure it won't give up its secret."

WHILE Kristenson was talking, Kim's foot had been moving sideways, a fraction of an inch at a time. He had it curled, now, around the leg of the table that held the lamp. Just as Kristenson's finger started to whiten on the trigger, Kim yanked with his foot. The table and the lamp crashed over. The bulb shattered and the light went out. The room was pitch black. Kristenson's gun roared and the bullet riffled through Kim's hair as he dropped to the rug. He rolled a few feet away and lay perfectly quiet.

The room was tomb-still now for a moment. The only sound was someone's labored breathing. Nobody moved. And then, abruptly, a board in the floor squeaked, over to Kim's left. The gun cracked once more and Lola Kristenson screamed again. This time an ear-piercing sound that went right through Kim's brain. He threw himself across the room in the direction of the gun flash.

His shoulder hit against something hard and Kim knew instinctively that it was Kristenson's artificial limbs. The other man crashed backward to the floor, mouthing sewer language. Kim swarmed all over him. He got his fingers tangled in Kristenson's lank blond hair and whopped his head up and down on the hard floor a hundred times, at least, before some of the wild anger flowed out of him. Then he got to his feet and lit a match. With the aid of its small glow, he found another lamp and lit it.

He saw that Kristenson was out cold. He looked toward where Lola had been standing and she was now sprawled on her back on the floor and there was a great splotch of red

staining her green gown around the bullet hole in her chest.

Kim Magee pushed his hand up into the thick, graying hair at his temples and staggered toward the bedroom. He found Connie all right. He untied her and for quite awhile, they sat there on the bed, with her tight in his arms, her head buried against his shoulder, while she cried herself out.

When she was able to talk, they told each other all that had happened. He led her gently outside. For a moment, they stopped in the doorway, fright stiffening them. Arch Kristenson had come to. He was over by his wife, down on his knees. He was rocking back and forth over her, tears staining his pale, thin cheeks. He was saying:

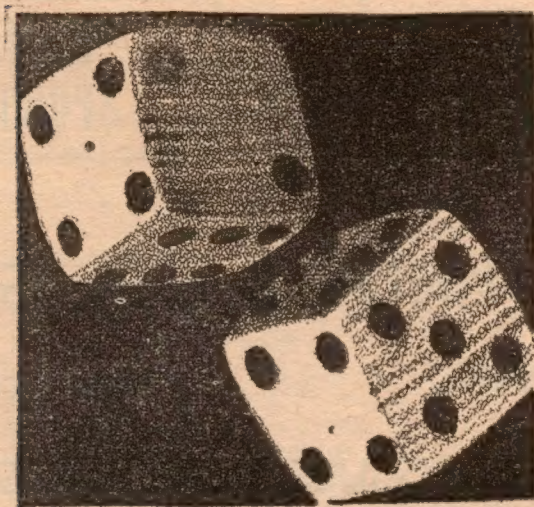
"Lola, honey, I—I didn't mean it, I swear. I didn't mean to kill you. I—I thought it was Magee, Lola.

You—you've got to forgive me, honey. It was an accident, I tell you. An accident."

Lola didn't answer him, of course. She never would, again. But Kristenson kept pleading with her. Kim walked quickly toward the guns on the floor, scooped them up but Kristenson paid no attention. Kim said to him:

"Yeah, you killed her by accident. you were good at killing people that way. It's a fitting end. It should satisfy that fine sense of the dramatic that you have."

Kristenson just turned and looked at him, blankly, then went back to pleading with his dead wife, the mind that had been skating on the thin ice of insanity for so long, finally breaking through. He didn't even look up again when Kim called the police.



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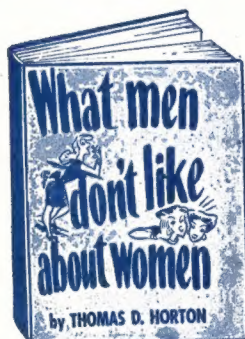
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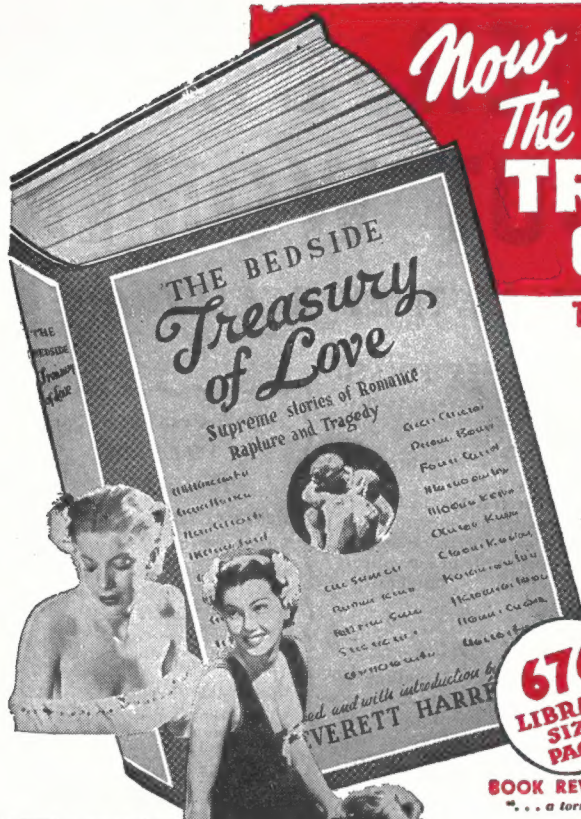
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